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The T-130 is the latest in a long and illustrious line of Whytes that let you go anywhere, ride anything and have maximum fun along the way. Boasting 130mm of QUAD-4 suspension travel, 650b wheels and Whyte's groundbreaking trail bike geometry, the T-130 is fast and fun on the trails you ride from your front door, whilst never feeling out of its depth when you travel further afield, be it to a UK trail centre, or even the Alps. However you like to ride, in the T-130 you'll discover a bike that's as versatile as a Swiss army knife, and that quickly becomes a trusted companion for a lifetime of adventure, wherever the trail takes you.

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ON THE COVER

Scoping out secret singletrack on the Isle of Wight
Photographer:
Rupert Fowler



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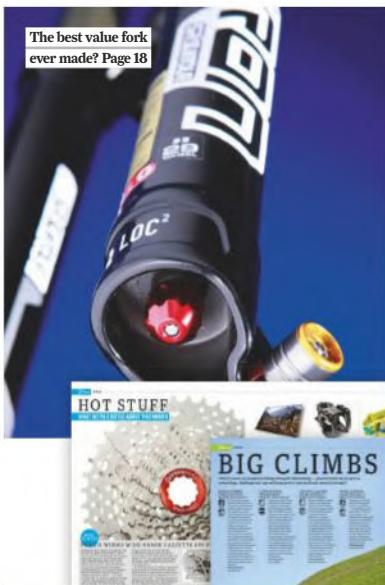
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with our how-to guide
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Summer of spinning headlines

Getting out on the trails is the best antidote to news overload

This is the time of year when it can seem like there might not be a new issue at all. Or at least, not on time...

Our desks are deserted most days. This is launch season, when new bikes are released almost every day — this year usually in the new 'plus' wheel sizes, with wide rims and soft, fat tyres. Just keeping up makes every week a whirlwind.

Plus, of course, this is the time to be out exploring the UK with big articles in mind. Nowhere looks better than it does right now — as long as the trailside vegetation hasn't gone completely crazy in the sunshine — and every mtb community and every trail centre is as buzzing and vibrant as it gets.

But on top of all that, this is the time when it's impossible to stay in the office anyway. When the sun is shining and the days are long, there's more motivation than ever to ride the test bikes and longtermers one more time, to squeeze in another run before heading into work, to ride, ride, and ride some more.

We love this job, and we wouldn't swap it for the world. I hope our passion for what we do shines through in these pages — if we hit our deadlines, that is...

Simon
Editor, **mbr**



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Model shown: Jeep Renegade 1.4 MultiAir II 140 hp Limited FWD Manual with optional two-tone alloy wheels and optional bi-colour paint at £23,545 OTR. [^]The 9-Speed automatic transmission is standard on selected Limited & Trailhawk versions and the 7" TFT is standard on all Limited, Opening Edition & Trailhawk versions. OFFICIAL FUEL CONSUMPTION FIGURES FOR JEEP RENEGADE RANGE MPG (L/100KM): EXTRA URBAN 47.9 (5.9) – 70.6 (4.0), URBAN 32.5 (8.7) – 51.4 (5.5), COMBINED 40.9 (6.9) – 61.4 (4.6), CO₂ EMISSIONS: 160 – 120 G/KM. Fuel consumption and CO₂ figures are obtained for comparative purposes in accordance with EC directives/regulations and may not be representative of real-life driving conditions. Factors such as driving style, weather and road conditions may also have a significant effect on fuel consumption. *Promotion available on The All-New Jeep Renegade models registered by 30th September 2015. 0% APR Representative Hire Purchase available for a 3-year term with a minimum deposit of 13%. Finance subject to status. Guarantees may be required. Terms and Conditions apply. Jeep Financial Services, PO Box 4465, Slough, SL1 0RW. Jeep® is a registered trademark of FCA US LLC.



Big picture

The first ever three-day Enduro2 event brought almost 12,000m of technical Alpine enduro descending (in teams of two) to the awesome trails around Les Arcs, France at the end of June. Slashing Alpine flowers in the summer meadows above Peisey-Nancroix — in the stunning Vanoise National Park — Kiwi rippers Meggie Bichard and Raewyn Morrison are a long way from home, but it didn't stop the two women from finishing 12th placed pair overall.

Mick Kirkman





Big picture

Mid-October and the Lake District comes alive with bright autumnal colours, and when the sun shines there can't be many places better to ride. At the end of a long and slightly chilled sunny day on Helvellyn, Rachael Walker from Hope Technology descends a sweet and twisty section of singletrack (which lies between a series of technical rocky steps and the entry to the forest) off the fells towards the trailhead and car park on the A591.

Steve Thomas





Big picture

Expect to see a whole lot more of this place in the near future. It's called Zona Zero, around the town of Ainsa on the edge of the Spanish Pyrenees, and it's home to literally hundreds of kilometres of singletrack. In September it will host the penultimate round of the Enduro World Series, an event that will well and truly put it on the mountain biking map. With year-round riding possible, Ainsa should be top of your list of riding destinations for autumn/winter 2015.

Juan Otazu





If you've ever had a hankering to own a totally unique bike, something you'd never see the like of on the trails, take a close look at this Juliana Furtado. Juliana is the women's-specific sister brand to Santa Cruz but it's the custom paintjob that's the real standout feature: doodled by talented graffiti artist and regular mbr snapper Sam Needham.

There's a story behind those doodles though — penned for Hope rider Rachael Walker and designed to show the relationship between bike and rider.

"After the Andes Pacifico in February, Sam and me got a little carried away over a few beers," Rachael says. "From my blurred memory I remember us talking over each other as we threw ideas around of your bike telling a story, a story of all the adventures a rider shares with it."

The Furtado tells the tale of Rachael's favourite trips past and planned, including the Andes Pacifico, the Trans Provence, local rides in the Lakes, hand-drawn with a Sharpie pen onto the frame over the course of weeks.

"Sam was pretty nervous to begin with and it took

him a while to pluck up the courage to start getting creative with the purple Sharpie pen," Rachael said.

Lee and Vicky at InvisiFrame then applied the finishing touches to protect Sam's artwork. Meanwhile the guys at Hope took Sam's doodles and turned them into workable laser etching programmes — lasering skulls and lightning bolts on hubs and brake lids.

"From a distance now the result looks similar to a tattoo sleeve," Rachael said.

YOUR CUSTOM FRAME

Sweden-based slikgraphics.com will create a totally unique design for anything bike-related — helmet, frame, shock, forks, even mudguards; price on request. For a cheaper option choose bike-specific logos and colourways for your Orange, Mondraker, Nukeproof or 11 other brands, from £19.99.

DIY paintjobs are the ultimate custom touch



HIGH TECH, LOW COST

Could Suntour's £380 Auron fork be the best suspension buy of 2015?

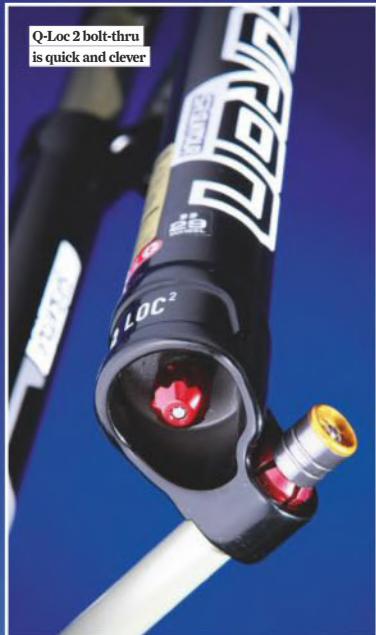
You might have seen Suntour's forks before — the company's budget forks grace the front end of many of the best £500 entry-level hardtails. But you probably haven't seen its top-end after-market forks, such as the new Auron here. Designed for enduro or all-mountain riding, it's currently being thrown about by Enduro World Series rider and Megavalanche winner Rémy Absalon.

Make no mistake, the Auron RC2 is a sophisticated fork. You get both high and low-speed compression dials and a clever Q-Loc 2 bolt-thru axle that's easy and quick to use. The 34mm stanchions and a forged, hollow alloy crown should help to keep the weight pretty low, and inside the damper has a sealed cartridge.

New for this year, Suntour tells us it has made improvements to the bushings to help the fork glide up and down more smoothly. A new negative spring should also help the Auron break away and get into its travel more easily too, meaning better small-bump sensitivity. And finally there's a new air volume chamber adjustment system to tune the spring curve and change the progression.

Want to know the best thing, though? Suntour appears to have forgotten that this is a premium product — the £379.99 price tag seems insanely low for this kind of specification.

Could it be that the latest trend in top-performing budget forks — like the Suntour, the DT Swiss XMM and the Manitou Mattoc — is having an impact on RockShox pricing too? The listed price for a Pike RCT3 is £780 but online retailers sell them for as little as £480. Let's hope Fox takes note too and drops the £909 price tag of the Fox 36 Float FIT RC2.



THE FUTURE OF VIDEO

The latest action cams will follow you automatically, edit the footage for you and even stream live to your own virtual TV channel. Beam us up...

4GEE ACTION CAM

EE's phone network now has its own Action Cam, which can stream your videos live over the internet. It looks similar to a GoPro and even uses the same mounts, so you can strap it to your chest, helmet or bike, and it records in HD at 1080p. There's even a chunky watch to let you control it and see what you're filming.

Where it differs from the GoPro is live streaming — you can now transmit your video over the 4G network (or record it like a regular camera), letting friends and family watch it over a new player called Skeegle.

It's an interesting development, even if it's pretty niche. You'll have to pay

£399.99 (pay as you go, bundled with 24Gb of data) to allow other people to watch your videos — and most live, unedited footage from an action camera is pretty dull. Signing up for a monthly tariff, just like a phone, is also a big commitment for something you'll probably use



Broadcast your ride with 4GEE

sporadically, and then there's the coverage — you're unlikely to get full 4G anywhere you want to ride a mountain bike.

Perhaps the best way to look at the Action Cam, then, is to see it as a way to buy an HD camera for just £15 a month (24-month contract), dodging the hefty upfront cost of its rivals.

From £15/month, ee.co.uk

AIRDOG

The age of your own personal drone has arrived. The Airdog is basically a flying gimbal and GoPro mount; a drone that automatically takes off (and lands!) and follows you where you ride thanks to an Aireleash, worn on your wrist. You'll get up to 20 minutes' flight time and the drone goes up to 40mph so should keep up nicely — but of course you also need to buy a GoPro too.

£820 (delivery late 2015), airdog.com



TOMTOM BANDIT

The Bandit from sat-nav specialist TomTom has some clever technology going on. An HD video POV camera with 4K quality, the Bandit will also edit your footage for you at the shake of your phone, something it does by measuring your speed, G-force, altitude, rotation and heartbeat and then working out what's interesting.

£299, tomtom.com



Q-Loc 2 15mm bolt-thru axle to boost stiffness

3D ROBOTICS IRIS+

Iris+ has features galore — it will fly and follow you just as the Airdog and Lily do, or you can fly it manually using a controller. You can also draw a route for it to follow. If it gets lost or runs low on batteries it can be programmed to return home too. Again, you'll need to buy a GoPro as well.

£380, 3drobotics.com



LILY

Another drone, the Lily is a neater package than the Airdog and comes with its own 1080p camera. Throw it into the air and it flies, tracking you with the same technology as the Airdog. It's also waterproof and packs down so you could genuinely get it inside your riding pack. GoPro not included.

£630 (delivery May 2016), lily.camera



HOT STUFF

WHAT WE'RE EXCITED ABOUT THIS MONTH



MOST WANTED

PRAXIS WORKS WIDE-RANGE CASSETTE £99.99

Several years ago, when the XX1 drivetrain was launched, we asked SRAM whether it would ever produce a 10-speed cassette with a similar wide-range gearing. It said 10-speed didn't really fit with the whole ethos of 1x, and to date it's been true to its word. But that hasn't stopped other manufacturers developing oversized gearing for the 10-speed drivetrain. Most of the attention has been focused on cassette expanders/adapters — extra large sprockets that you add to a traditional cassette — but one of the big issues with these is you have to eliminate one of the smaller sprockets, and this can often leave a big gap in your range.

Praxis Works is about to change all that with the launch of its new Wide-Range cassette. With 11, 13, 15, 17, 19, 21, 24, 28, 34 and 40t sprockets,

it allows you to have an extra low ratio, an adequate top gear and an even spread between gears. True, it still lacks the super-low option of a 42 or 44t expander cog, but there are smaller jumps between the gears and no missing sprockets.

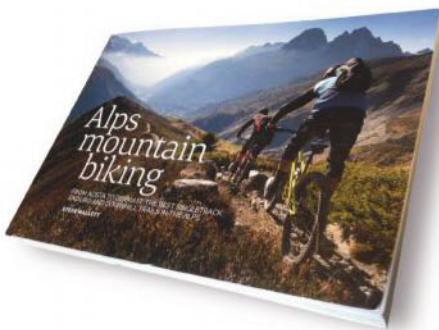
Praxis Works claims the shifting performance is just as good as a normal cassette, and that you don't have to make massive changes to the rear derailleur's B-tension adjustment, or fit a longer B-tension bolt — something you have to do with many expander cogs. The cassette also fits on a standard Shimano cassette body — there's no need for a dedicated XD driver.

Compared to a Shimano cassette, or a cassette expander cog, the Praxis Works Cassette is pricy, but it should mean you'll



Quite the spread: Praxis dishes up a sprocket feast

be able to eke out more use from a 10-speed drivetrain without having to blow the budget on a full 11-speed upgrade. A test soon.
upgradebikes.co.uk



RIDE GUIDE

Want to know where all the best trails are in the western Alps? Steve Mallett's new book, *Alps Mountain Biking*, contains over 50 Alpine routes to get you started. There's also info on what bike to take, and how to ride safely. £15, v-publishing.co.uk



SHORT AND SWEET

Easton's award-winning Haven stem now comes in an extra-short 35mm length. It features a 35mm bar clamp, a Top-Lock 'no-gap' faceplate and it's light too — only 123g. Available in longer 40, 50, 70 and 90mm. £79.99, silverfish-uk.com



GOOGLE BOX

Keep mud, grit and dust out of your eyes and stay 100 per cent focused on the trail ahead with the Accuri goggle. This is the Fiji colour option with a mirror blue lens, but there are hundreds of combinations. £44.99, decade-europe.com



MULTI-METRICS

Bike, swim or run, the Garmin Forerunner 920XT provides accurate feedback on your progress; it even tells you when you've been sitting down for too long. If you don't need mapping, it's a great alternative to the Garmin Edge. £389.99, madison.co.uk



WIND-SCREEN

The Shield Q women's jacket from Haglöfs will resist the wet and the wind for a time, and scrunches down small enough to stuff in a pocket or pack. It's breathable and flexible enough for multi-sport use. £100, cotswoldoutdoor.com



IPHONE UNPLUGGED

If you want to top up your phone charge on the trail, without needing to plug in, then you'll need the EnerPlex Surfr iPhone battery case. There's even a mini solar panel for charging the battery once on the move. £59.99, amazon.co.uk



BELT AND RACES

The Rip Strip from Race Face is like an off-road cummerbund, with pockets for tools, tube, pump and even your phone. There's no room for a water bottle, but it's perfect for a quick blast or travelling light. One size fits all. £39.99, silverfish-uk.com



EYE WOOD

Shred's Provocator Shrastawood glasses are perfect for hipsters — lightweight wooden arms, multi-colour laminate mainframe and Carl Zeiss Vision lenses, with excellent optical quality. Even the price is exclusive. £159, skibartlett.com



LUCKY SEVEN

Seven's IDP Control Keen pads have multi-density foam and a hard outer shell to protect your knees when you hit the deck. The articulated Active Flex Zone offers improved comfort when pedalling too. £99.99, decade-europe.com

BIG CLIMBS

There's more to mountain biking than just descending — good climbs can be just as rewarding, challenge our leg and lung power and push our mental strength

BLACK COMBE, LAKE DISTRICT 13.7km (8.5 miles)



It's not often you get a ride from the sea up to a summit, but Black Combe on the western fringes of the Lakes is just such a spot. Chances are you'll be the only rider on the hill too, thanks to the remote location. The ascent has 500m vertical of all-rideable climbing, before you're rewarded with cracking views of Ireland and a high-speed descent back down. Start at the big slip road (Landranger 96 SD136827) by the A595 and head south, turn L onto a metalled road at Whicham and climb all the way to the summit. The descent is dead ahead and loops you all the way back round to the road.

GPS download:
po.st/combe

CADAIR IDRIS, SNOWDONIA 24.5km (15.2 miles)



Cadair Idris doesn't have the height or the fame of its big cousin Snowdon, but it's arguably a better ride. For starters you can actually climb it... well, most of it, the top is a carry. It's fun to climb and descend too thanks to technical and challenging rocks, a fairly constant gradient and a pretty firm surface under wheel. Park at Abergynolwyn (Landranger 124 SH672089), head west on Llanegry Street, turn right at the telephone box, climb till the road runs out and turn off right. Climb to the summit, then bomb it back down.

GPS download:
po.st/cadair

JACOB'S LADDER, PEAK DISTRICT 22km (13.7 miles)



Make no mistake, Jacob's Ladder is exceptionally difficult to ride and there aren't many that can clean it in one. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't have a go. It's iconic and, when broken down into manageable parts, rewarding. Start at Edale car park and head on road to Upper Booth. Follow the road until it turns into a rough track, veer left at the fork and climb Jacob's Ladder. Drop down the other side, go L at Coldwell Clough and contour back round Brown Knoll. Turn L onto Chapel Gate and follow it home.

GPS download:
po.st/JacobClimb

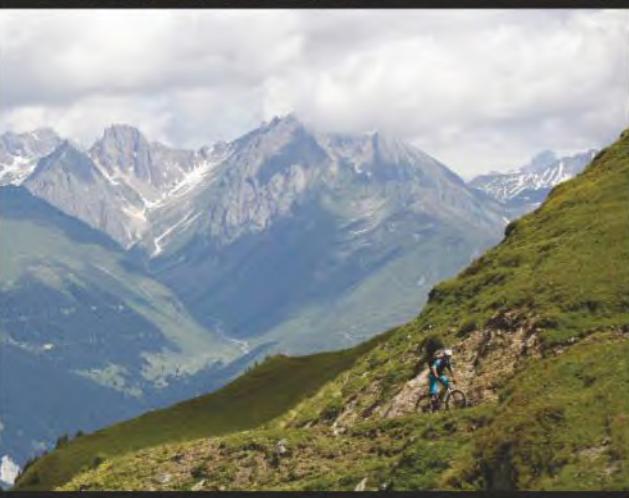
MIDDLE MOOR, PEAK DISTRICT 15km (9.3 miles)



Climbing up to Kinder Reservoir through the heather is a pleasure — challenging but with great views. There are more climbs in the middle rolling section too and then an exhilarating singletrack descent to finish. From Hayfield, head north-east up the Snake Path; the gate at the top marks the start of the fun. Return via Plainsteads, Matley Moor and Lantern Pike.

GPS download:
po.st/midmoor





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COMPONENTS OF ADVENTURE

THE ACCIDENTAL EPIC

From Land's End to John o' Groats, mountain bike newbies link trail centres to natural singletrack on the ride to end all rides

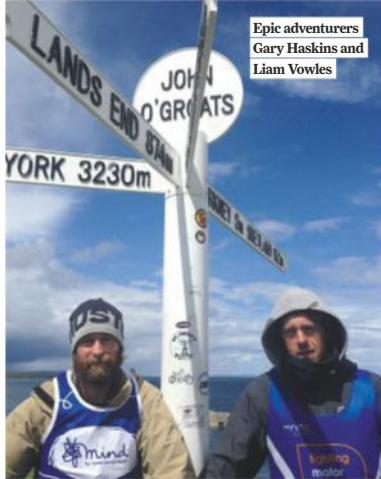
Travelling 1,200 miles, covering 168,000ft of climbing in 30 days of non-stop riding is for diehard trail riders, right? Not so, say Liam Vowles and Gary Haskins, both 33 and from Bristol, whose off-road charity epic took them from Cornwall to Scotland before they realised mountain biking was pretty good fun.

"Neither of us were mountain bikers before doing this," Vowles said. "We rode bikes for years and never really took it seriously, but we really enjoyed the route. I'm going to get a full-suspension bike now."

The End-to-End route from the tip of Cornwall to the furthest-northerly point in Scotland took the pair on some of the UK's best singletrack, from Exmoor and the Quantocks to the Black Mountains and the West Highland Way.

"We ended up planning day by day, working out each evening where to go the next day," Vowles said. "We rode bridlepaths, footpaths in Scotland and over open land, over Bodmin Moor, stumbled across trail centres like Ashton Court by accident, and rode singletrack over the Black Mountains around Offa's Dyke."

Some of the best riding was close to home, Vowles said. "The Quantocks were brilliant, loads of good singletrack and some mad stuff there too — we found ourselves on one of those downhill trails and had to



take it really easy, dodging the boulders."

Meeting people along the route added to the experience, Vowles said. "One family down in Cornwall gave us their mobile home for the night, then at Drovers Cycles at the bottom of Black Mountains the owner gave us free labour on a broken gear shifter."

The friends have so far raised £4,141.25 for Motor Neurone Disease and Mind after losing friends and family to the diseases. Go to their Just Giving page at po.st/end2end if you want to donate too.

RISE YOUR OWN EPIC

CWMCARN TO AFAN, SOUTH WALES

Cwmcarn and Afan, two of **mbr**'s favourite trail centres, lie less than 50km apart as the crow flies. Connect the two for one of the most rewarding and toughest rides we've ever tried. **GPS download:** po.st/SouthWales

WEST HIGHLAND WAY

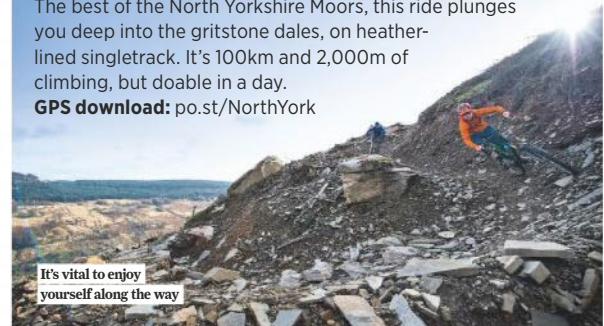
Linking Milngavie (just north of Glasgow) and Fort William, the Way is 100 miles of wild trails. Take it in small chunks and it's pretty beginner friendly, but Conic Hill and the Devil's Staircase will still catch out even the best riders.

GPS download: po.st/WHW

TOUR OF THE MOORS, NORTH YORKSHIRE

The best of the North Yorkshire Moors, this ride plunges you deep into the gritstone dales, on heather-lined singletrack. It's 100km and 2,000m of climbing, but doable in a day.

GPS download: po.st/NorthYork



GALLOWAY ADVENTURE

Want to go long in Scotland? Here's one they prepared earlier

If big miles and bigger views are your idea of a good day on the bike, look no further than the new Galloway Gallop ride in Scotland. Called

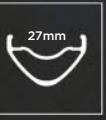
Adventure Cross, the Galloway Gallop will take riders across 67 miles of waymarked forest road in one of the best organised rides north of the border. Expect wilderness forest track, seldom-ridden moorland trails and views to boggle the mind.

For more information, go to p136 or book online at bookmyride.co.uk to enter the ride, which takes place on September 20. Once you've done the miles, head on over to the nearby Kirroughtree trail centre, of 7Stanes fame.



A PERFECT *HEIST*

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WHY PUMPING BEATS PEDALLING

How did DH star Aaron Gwin win the Leogang World Cup without a chain? He pumped to the podium – and here's how you can do it too

BERMS

Think of a built up, bermed corner as a roller on its side — the solid earth under your wheels will give you all the grip you need to hold your speed and even pump to increase it. Try pushing the bike into the first part of the berm and feel your momentum building as you extend your legs, then pop out of the end of the berm faster than you went in.

ROLLERS

Rollers on natural trails can be tough to spot but they will give you an injection of speed for little effort. Look out for undulations or lumps and bumps in the trail — anything smooth and sloping downwards — and try to push the bike into it, mirroring the shape of the trail with your body and bike.

JUMPS

Most of the speed boost from jumping comes from pushing the bike into the landing. In effect you're using your weight to pump the bike forwards and faster, so get airborne as much as possible. We're not talking about jumping 45ft tabletops here like Gwin boosted in Leogang, but anything you see on the trail — little rock slabs, earth ramps, a lattice of roots — can do the trick. Remember to push your bike into the downslope and pump that free speed.

ROOTS

Flying through the air is always faster than rolling on the ground because there's nothing to hit — no roots to slow your forward momentum and no friction from the trail. Deal with roots in one of three ways. You can use one as a take-off and gap the rest of them. If they're too slick-looking, try to bunny-hop over the lot. The easiest option is sometimes to press the bike into the ground before the root and then go light as you cross the slippery devils.





**WATCH
THE VIDEO**
Watch Gwin win
after snapping his
chain: po.st/gwin

MUSCLE MACHINE

HOW YOU REALLY PEDAL

Forget your FIT-damped fork and piggyback air shock; we explore the original full-suspension

1 Did you know you're only able to ride thanks to your motor units? Relax, no one's accusing you of slacking on an e-bike. This motor unit is a group of muscle fibres linked together by a branching nerve; every pedal stroke you make is the result of a multitude of these units firing together.

2 Firstly, an electrical impulse zooms down to the end of your nerves where a neurotransmitter (basically a chemical messenger) called acetylcholine (ACh) is released. ACh then carries the 'message' across the synapse, or gap, between nerve and muscle.

3 After hopping this gap, ACh triggers its own little electrical tsunami which sweeps along the muscle-fibre membrane. This wave soon washes up at a sort of network of tiny tubes where calcium ions are kept against their will — electrochemically speaking — and unlocks the doors of their 'cells'.

4 Liberated from their tubular prison, those ions barge into the space around the muscle fibres. There, like skilled hosts at a high-powered party, they enable the real movers and shakers of our story to bond by introducing them to each other. In this case the big players are two protein filaments called myosin and actin. Myosin's chunky and covered in a multitude of golf-club shaped heads while actin's skinny and shaped like a twisted string of beads.

5 Odd-looking pair they may be, but they instantly hit it off and it's their amorous dance that enables you to walk, run, cycle and even move your eyes to the end of this sentence. Powered by ATP, the molecule that provides energy for all life's processes, myosin pulls actin over itself by using its 'golf-club heads' which pivot, detach, straighten and reattach to its skinny partner. As a result, the muscle shortens and contracts.

WHAT'S IN A MUSCLE?

Muscle fibres are made of bundles of rod-like structures called myofibrils that contain overlapping thick and thin protein filaments called myosin and actin. These repeating units, or sarcomeres, form the distinctive striped bands that characterise skeletal muscle. During contraction the sarcomere shortens as the myofilaments slide over each other in response to an electrical impulse from a nerve. A nerve and the group of muscle fibres it activates are known as a motor unit.

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**Fuel your mtb's motor
for under tenner**

We're all about keeping you riding happy and for longer at **mbr**, so Science in Sport's new Endurance Pack gets our vote. It has everything for a day's ride — energy drink and electrolyte sachets to fuel your ride, recovery drink for afterwards and energy bars and gels to dodge the bonk. It's even got a bottle in the starter pack.

£9.99 scienceinsport.com



€URO DEALS

The pound is stronger against the euro than it's been in years — take advantage and hunt out European sites for cut-price gear, bike and holiday bargains. Here's what we found...



£136
(+£51 MOUNTING,
HARDWARE AND
ROTORS)

SHIMANO XT BRAKE SET

Simply the best brake on the market today, with loads of stopping power, a great lever shape for controlling it, and adjustments for bite-point and reach. At £115 per wheel in the UK, they're hardly overpriced, but at £136 for front and rear on Germany's bike-discount.de, they're incredible value (as long as the pound stays strong).

bike-discount.de. Also try bike24.net, bike-components.de, actionsports.de and probikeshop.com



£3,006

COMMENCAL META AM V4 ALC (2015)

In March we reviewed the Meta AM V4 with BOS suspension and loved its cutting-edge geometry, innovative design with customisable components and sensitive suspension. It was good value then, at £3,487, but now it looks incredible, with Race Face carbon cranks, XO1 gears and BOS fork and shock. Also try the Rose Granite Chief 3 and the YT Capra AL1, all of which have shifted south in price.

commencal-store.co.uk, rosebikes.com, yt-industries.com



£478

ONE WEEK IN MOLINI, ITALY

Riding in Europe has always been good, delivering plenty of singletrack for your pound, but the weak euro has made that all the more affordable. We found a week's shuttling and accommodation with Riviera Bike in Molini for €675, which is £478. Pure Mountains in Malaga also have some cracking deals, but they tell us they're putting up their euro prices soon, so book fast for the best possible deal.

rivierabike.co.uk, puremountains.com

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MUST-HAVE GEAR

Essential upgrades that will make the biggest difference to your time on the bike



01 DROPPER POST

Raise or lower your saddle at the push of a button: no QR faffing and no climbing with the saddle too low.

BEST: RockShox Reverb Stealth, £350 fisheroutdoor.co.uk

TOP VALUE: Giant Contact Switch, £169.99 giant-bicycles.com

02 SHORTS AND LINER

Proper mtb liner shorts cushion the load, while baggy outers protect you from the trail.

BEST: Gore Alp X-Shorts+, £139.99 gore-apparel.co.uk, Scott Underwear, £44.99 scott-sports.com

TOP VALUE: Madison Flux, £59.99 madison.co.uk

03 FRONT TYRE

Forget expensive suspension forks, start with a good front tyre and dramatically improve grip and cornering speed. Go for a good all-weather tyre, then buy a mud tyre in the autumn if you can stretch to it.

BEST: Maxxis High Roller II, £49.99 maxxis.co.uk

TOP VALUE: Specialized Storm Control, £29.99 specialized.co.uk

04 PRESSURE GAUGE

Hit the tyre-pressure sweetspot with an accurate pressure gauge to ensure maximum grip and minimum punctures.

BEST: Topeak D2 Smart Head,

£24.99 extrak.co.uk

TOP VALUE: BBB Digital Pressure Gauge, bbbcycling.com £11.95

05 SHOES

Mtb shoes have stiffer soles that your old trainers, for better power transfer, more grip and extra protection from impacts.

BEST: Five Ten Impact VXi, £115 fiveten.com

TOP VALUE: Shimano AM41, £84.99 madison.co.uk

06 CONTROLS

A good bar and stem gives you better steering control, while comfy grips stop your hands buzzing.

BEST: Race Face Next 35, £129; Atlas 35 stem, £79.95; Half Nelson grips, £19.95 all from silverfish-uk.com

TOP VALUE: Nukeproof Warhead bar £44.99 and stem £29.99; Element grips £14.99 all from hotlines-uk.com

07 FORK TOKENS

Change the spring curve on your fork with just five minutes' work and plastic tokens. The right tune can dramatically improve performance.

How to: po.st/piketokens and po.st/foxCTD

FOX: £33.60 for spacers and kit from mojo.co.uk

ROCKSHOX: £12.99 for three from fisheroutdoor.co.uk

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there's a Schwalbe



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on Facebook

Featured tire: The Magic Mary



schwalbe.co.uk

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First rides

SWINGING A LEG OVER WHAT'S HOT



YT INDUSTRIES CAPRA AL1

£1,939.13 / 650b / yt-industries.com

NEED TO KNOW

- Alloy version of the formidable Capra
- Available in an XL frame size
- RockShox suspension delivers 160mm of travel at the front, 165mm at the rear
- Geometry mirrors the carbon bikes

The alloy version of the game-changing Capra has lost nothing in translation

When YT Industries launched the Capra it changed the mtb retail landscape forever. While the big brands were busy pumping out £5,000 carbon enduro bikes, YT delivered a formidable race-ready machine with a dream build kit for almost half the going rate. No surprise, then, that the Bos-equipped Capra CF Pro walked our Enduro bike test and narrowly missed out on our 2014 Bike of the Year award.

Fast forward one year and YT is shaking things up once again, this time with an alloy version of the Capra. The AL tag is a little misleading though, as the seatstays on the alloy bike are actually made from carbon. Confused? Don't be, it's just the front

end that changes material as you switch between models, and the magic numbers that made the original Capra such a capable enduro bike remain unchanged.

Well, almost. One big difference on the alloy Capra, that answers the prayers of taller riders like me, is that it's now available in an XL frame size — the carbon bike only comes in S, M and L. To put some numbers on the sizing, the reach on the XL is 15mm longer than the size L and the head tube is 10mm taller too. Looking at all of the models on YT's website, it's easy to see why 6ft-plus riders could be seduced by the size L carbon Capra, but having ridden both options, the XL alloy bike is definitely a better fit. It's by no means massive, but at 6ft 2in the XL felt bob-on for me.



Carbon seatstays
activate the Monarch
Plus shock



YT Capra: astounding value machine with flawless componetry



SRAM X1 rear mech keeps gear shifts sweet and predictable



Longer reach and taller head tube for XL



Throwing a leg over the Capra AL1 at BikePark Wales, I was instantly reminded what a trail weapon it is. It felt a lot like being reacquainted with an old friend and it took no time at all to find my groove. Diving into the roughest tracks at breakneck speed, the rear suspension gobbed up braking bumps, floated over rocks and roots, while always remaining planted and controlled.

The Capra AL feels like a featherweight fighter, with a knockout punch



Make no mistake though, the Capra isn't just a point-and-shoot monster truck. There's finesse in the handling too. Load the suspension up, and time your weight shift to coincide with the rebound stroke, and the Capra AL feels like a featherweight fighter, with all the fancy footwork and a knockout punch. And it's this lightness to the ride that makes it such a fun, agile bike. I got exactly the same feeling when testing the carbon Capra on northern Italy's finest enduro trails, only this time the bike wasn't too small for me.

On most entry-level bikes you can usually guarantee there will be a couple of components that you'll instantly swap out. Not so with the Capra AL1 — from the Maxxis tyres to the Sensus Disisdaboss grips there's not a single hair out of place. Another feature that long-legged riders will really appreciate is the 150mm drop Reverb, with the right-hand remote mounted neatly

under the left brake lever. The guys at YT seem to have thought of every detail, so nothing distracts from the pleasure of riding. It's astonishing that you can have an enduro bike of this calibre delivered to your door and still have change from £2,000. Good times guaranteed.

Christian Fairclough



1ST IMPRESSION

HIGHS

Killer ride straight out of the box. XL frame size means 6ft plus riders can now join in the fun. Top-end RockShox suspension components. Dream build kit at a reasonable price.

LOWS

No space in the frame for a water bottle. Long lead times on availability.

SPECIFICATION

Frame Capra aluminium, 165mm travel
Shock RockShox Monarch Plus RC3
Fork RockShox Pike RCT3, 160mm travel
Wheels DT Swiss E1900 Spline, Maxxis High Roller II 27.5x2.4in tyres
Drivetrain Race Face Turbine chainset, SRAM X1 r-mech and shifter, e*thirteen XCX+ guide
Brakes SRAM Guide R 200/180mm
Components Race Face Atlas 35 770mm bar and 50mm stem, RockShox Reverb 150mm dropper post, SDG Duster YT saddle
Sizes S, M, L, XL
Weight 14.18kg (31.2lb)

GEOMETRY

Size ridden XL
Rider height 6ft 2in
Head angle 65.4°
Seat angle 72°
BB height 341mm
Chainstay 431mm
Front centre 748mm
Wheelbase 1,215mm
Down tube 720mm
Top tube 622mm
Reach 480mm

SHIMANO XT GROUPSET

£407.93 / madison.co.uk

NEED TO KNOW

- Shimano's second tier mtb groupset goes 11-speed for 2016
- Two wide-range cassette options — 11-40t and 11-42t
- New Shadow Plus rear mech gets external spring tension adjustment
- 30, 32 and 34t DCE chainring sizes offered
- Lighter Hollowtech II bottom bracket
- Double and triple chainsets and front mechs also available

Shimano's new XT groupset promises better versatility than XTR at a fraction of the cost. What better way to test it than 10,000m of Alpine descending?

Two months ago, Shimano called asking if I could send a frame to its UK distributor, Madison. It would be built up with a 2016 Shimano XT groupset and shipped out to the French Alps where we'd be reunited for several days of big mountain hammering. If it could handle the kind of demanding terrain found out there, then surely it can deal with anything in the UK.

A lot of the features of new XT are outlined in our web story — which can be read at po.st/ShimanoXT — so I'm going to cut to the chase and talk about my first ride impressions.

With XT, I reckon there are two questions every rider wants the answer to: has Shimano solved the problem of chain retention, and does the 11-speed cassette offer a wide enough gear range?

Let's begin with the subject of drivetrain security. There were five journalists and three Shimano guys on this trip, and not a single rider lost a chain during four days

of riding. Like XTR, XT uses Shimano's Dynamic Chain Engagement design, utilising a deeper tooth shape with a retaining hook machined into the leading edge. This DCE technology is very subtle, but it works. It remains to be seen how wear will reduce effectiveness but, to improve durability, Shimano uses a two-piece stainless steel/carbon construction, which it claims should last three times as long as plain aluminium.

When Shimano launched XTR 1x11, one of the early criticisms was that the cassette wasn't as wide ratio as SRAM's offerings. New XT has two cassette options — 11-40t (like XTR) and a wider range 11-42t. It's still not as wide as SRAM's 10-42t, but the question you have to ask yourself is: do you need a 10t sprocket? You might, but I didn't, even in the Alps.

I was only able to test the 11-40t cassette (the 11-42t is not available until the end of August) but the closer ratios meant I never found myself churning along one minute

and spinning madly the next. The Shadow Plus derailleur also seems to work better, and for 2016, now has external clutch tension adjustment.

There are still some unknowns, mostly to do with durability. I have no idea whether the retention performance is going to drop off as the chainring wears; only a winter's worth of riding will reveal that. Muddy, slippery trails will also tell me whether the gearing on the 11-40t cassette is too stiff for my ageing legs, and I'll have to bail out on to the 11-42t.

Compared to its rivals the 2016 XT groupset is an absolute bargain



I've done enough Alpine riding to know that any component not up to the job will come back in a box. My bike stayed out there for a few more days, ridden by one of our freelancers, and apparently he had no issues with the chainring, gearing or overall performance.

SRAM may have introduced the first dedicated 1x11 drivetrain, it may also be lighter (we've not had weights for a complete XT groupset yet) and have a wider range cassette. But for me Shimano's key advantage is its price. You only have to look at the comparison below to see the 2016 XT groupset is an absolute bargain.

Paul Burwell

mbr 1ST IMPRESSION

HIGHS

Reliable chain retention, slick shifting, stiff cranks, powerful, easy-to-service disc brakes, shockingly good value for money.

LOWS

None that I can think of.

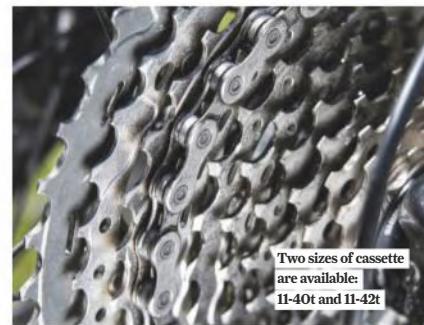


The new XT passed the Alpine challenge with flying colours



Clutch mech now features external tension adjustment

PRICING	Shimano XT	SRAM GX	SRAM X1
Bottom Bracket	£29.99	£29	£29
Crank	£99.99	£155	£210
Chainring	£49.99	NA	NA
Cassette	£79.99	£115	£246
Chain	£27.99	£25	£25
Rear Derailleur	£74.99	£90	£179.99
Shifter	£44.99	£35	£59.99
TOTAL	£407.93	£449	£749.98



Two sizes of cassette are available:
11-40t and 11-42t

MOMSEN VIPA TEAM ISSUE

£2,495 (Frame kit) / 29in /
momsenbikes.com

**A lightweight marathon
bike optimised for a single-
ring drivetrain**

NEED TO KNOW

- All-carbon marathon machine built for speed
- Stiffer chainstay design optimised for 1x11 drivetrain
- New trail-friendly version in the pipeline

A collaboration between renowned engineer Patrick Morewood and fellow South African Victor Momsen, the VIPA answers the question of what do you do after leaving the bike company that still bears your name. An all-out XC speed machine for racers and KoM chasing whippets, the VIPA superficially resembles a Specialized Epic minus proprietary Brain shock and 'Horst link' suspension design. Given it has just 80mm of rear travel — 15mm less than the Epic — Momsen hopes you won't miss either.

Marathon machine or not, the VIPA is outwardly burly with a massively oversized front triangle screaming stiffness and speed. Same goes for the asymmetric rear end — again all carbon — and a design that, like Specialized, aligns the shock with the forces going into it for accurate response. Morewood's favoured low-leverage ratio varies from 2.12 to 1.99 and has a 'rising to falling' curve. This initially accentuates the naturally rising rate of the air shock, dropping off at the end as the air is compressed to make sure you get every millimetre of travel.

Weighing just under two kilos, the medium size frame includes a 142mm Maxle



The rear shock's ratio is set to maximise travel



Full carbon rear end with seatstay pivot

rear, mount for a front mech and stealth routing for a dropper post but external cabling for gears and brakes. Not trendy says Momsen, but likely to be appreciated in emergency late-night fettling between stints in a marathon race.

The VIPA looks fast and proves itself exactly that on the trail, the minimal but well-controlled rear suspension encouraging a stand-up-and-attack style. Morewood's DH roots mean it's something of a ripper at heart though; a tad slacker than an Epic and happy to pump and jump shallow trail centre undulations in the pursuit of yet more speed.

Beware of the sizing though. The medium, as tested, counts as a 17in in Momsen's literature, and will be cramped

for anyone over 5ft 9in. The large is listed as a 19in, but taller riders may be better served by the Epic, which is available in an XL option. Other than that, there's a lot to like about the VIPA, not least for proving marathon bikes aren't necessarily all about work and no play.

Dan Trent



1ST IMPRESSION



HIGHS

Proves marathon bikes can be fast AND fun.



LOWS

Sizing restrictive for taller riders.

SPECIFICATION

Frame Carbon front triangle, Carbon ix rear triangle, 80mm travel

Fork Magura TS8 eLECT 100 29in, 100mm travel

Rear shock Fox Float CTD Kashima with remote lockout

Wheels Stans No Tubes 3.30in, Stans No Tubes ZTR Crest rims, Vee Tire Mission 29x2.25in tyres

Drivetrain SRAM XX1 crank, r-mech, and shifter

Brakes Formula R1, 165/160mm

Components Momsen DOWNer stem, DOWNer bars, Syntace seatpost, Fabric saddle

Weight 10.57kg (23.3lb)

Sizes S, M, L

GEOMETRY

Size ridden Medium

Rider height 5ft 10in

Head angle 69.5°

Seat angle 68.7°

BB height 338mm

Chainstay 440mm

Front centre 675mm

Wheelbase 1,115mm

Down tube 670mm

Top tube 595mm

Reach 419mm

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MONDRAKER DUNE CARBON XR

£6,599 / 650b / mondraker.com

NEED TO KNOW

- Full carbon version of the 160mm-travel Dune
- Three-model range starts at £4,599
- Adjustable chainstay length and head angle

The new lightweight, full-carbon Dune is pushing the mtb boundaries again with its huge wheelbase and adaptable geometry

Mondraker's first Forward Geometry Dune XR sent ripples of change through the bike industry when it first appeared in 2013. Since then, there has been a gradual shift towards longer, slacker, more gravity-orientated enduro bikes, to the point where Forward Geometry no longer seems quite so radical. But with the new carbon version of the Dune, Mondraker is once again sticking its head above the parapet with a bike that pushes the boundaries.

With a 1,240mm wheelbase, the new Dune Carbon (in size large) is the longest bike I've ever ridden. And while many brands top out at this size (to reduce manufacturing costs) Mondraker also

offers an XL model, featuring a whopping 1,265mm wheelbase and 508mm reach. Apart from the Chris Porter-designed Mojo/Nicolai Geometron, only the Orange Alpine 160 comes close on sizing. If you're over six foot, that should be music to your ears.

Weighing just 2,450g for a medium frame without shock, the new Dune Carbon is not only a very competitive weight, it's an exceptional piece of engineering. It actually saves an impressive 580g over its aluminium counterpart, and gets Mondraker's now signature features, such as the toned-down hunchbacked top tube, cantilevered bottom bracket, front 'window' behind the head tube, and split mast linking the seat and chainstays. Even the upper suspension link is one-piece carbon.

The head angle can be run at 65, 66 or 67°

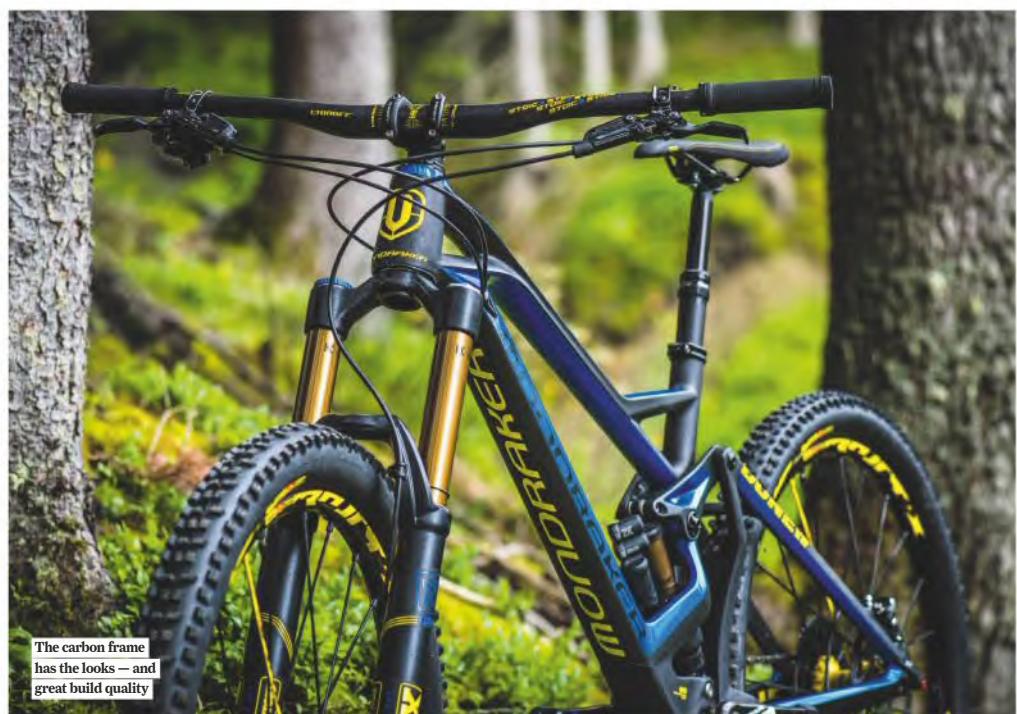




Replaceable dropouts allow two possible chainstay lengths



Even the upper link has been made using carbon



The carbon frame has the looks – and great build quality

SPOTLIGHT ON...

Adjustable geometry

Mondraker broke new ground when it introduced adjustable geometry on its Summum downhill bike, back in 2009. Now, this innovation has been incorporated into the new Dune Carbon frame. With it, you can play with the chainstay length and head angle, giving a multitude of configurations to suit different riding styles, terrain and frame sizes. Replaceable dropouts give two chainstay lengths – 430mm (standard) and 440mm – while offset headset cups allow the head angle to be run at 65, 66 or 67° (the cups will also fit the Foxy). The geometry adjust kit comes as standard with the Dune Carbon XR and the frameset, but it can be purchased separately for the other two models.

SPECIFICATION

Frame Stealth, full carbon, 160mm travel

Shock Fox Float X2 Factory Kashima

Fork Fox 36 Float FIT, 170mm travel

Wheels Mavic Crossmax XL Ltd, Mavic Crossmax Quest XL 27.5x2.4in tyres

Drivetrain SRAM X01 crank, shifter and r-mech

Brakes SRAM Guide RSC, 180mm

Components OnOff Stoic stem (35mm), Carbon 780mm bars, RockShox Reverb Stealth seatpost

Weight 13.05kg (28.12lb)

Sizes S, M, L, XL

GEOMETRY

Size ridden L

Rider height 5ft 10in

Head angle 65.4° (slack)

Seat angle 69.9°

BB height 353mm

Chainstay 430 (short)

Front centre 810mm

Wheelbase 1,240mm

Down tube 735mm

Top tube 655mm

Reach 493mm

spacers and/or a higher rise bar. Limited time, poor weather and multiple trail closures hampered our chance to get fully acquainted with the Dune Carbon XR, but there were enough moments of brilliance to make us impatient for the next opportunity to ride one.

Danny Milner

mbr 1ST IMPRESSION

HIGHS

Forward Geometry is, once again, pushing the limits. A bike that will fit large humans. Significant weight saving from the carbon frame. Ability to tune handling and geometry is a great addition.

LOWS

Low front ends would benefit from a riser bar. Mavic Quest tyres are a handful in the wet.

hope



DEVELOPMENT

DEVELOPED OVER MANY YEARS THE HOPE CRANK HAS BEEN DESIGNED USING THE LATEST FINITE ELEMENT ANALYSIS TOOLS AND EXTENSIVE MULTI DISCIPLINE FIELD TESTING

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- COMPATIBILITY WITH MOST BOTTOM 30MM BRACKET SYSTEMS

DIMENSIONS

- 165, 170 AND 175MM LENGTH
- Q-FACTOR 167MM
- CHAINLINE - 49MM
- WEIGHT 641G (ARMS, AXLE AND SPLINED 30T SPROCKET)
- 26T-36T SPIDERLESS RETAINER CHAINRINGS
- SINGLE 104BCD CHAINRING SPIDERS

CONSTRUCTION

- 3-PIECE CONSTRUCTION
- FORGED AND CNC MACHINED 7000 SERIES ALUMINIUM CRANK ARMS
- 30MM OVERSIZED AXLE



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NEW ISSUE ON SALE WEDS AUGUST 19

REAL WORLD RIDING

Dan Trent just wants to ride – but life keeps getting in the way

New Yorkshire

Dan is returning north to rediscover the trails of his youth

It's 15 years since I last lived up north, closer to 20 since the West Yorkshire trails that'll soon be on my doorstep were my regular stamping ground. Blimey, that's a sobering thought. As I type I'm but a couple of weeks away from packing up and following a removal truck up the M1, and the anticipation of dusting off my old trail knowledge has got me rubbing my hands with glee.

I hope it's as good as I remember though.

Because, how far have bikes and, dare I say, my riding come on since I was last living in Yorkshire? Well, OK, maybe just the bikes. Back in the day, I had an Orange Clockwork with rigid forks, cantilever brakes and 3x7 gearing. I've remained brand loyal since, but I've got a bit more hardware to fall back on these days.

Though I have ridden there in the intervening years, so my trail knowledge won't be two entire decades out of date, I'm interested to see how much of the old network remains in my head.

Riding a bike is a physical activity, but I also love the cerebral puzzle of piecing together a good ride, filing those nuggets in your brain and creating a mental library of routes, trails and landmarks to rummage through as you crank the pedals at the start of a ride. It's taken me a few years down here in Hertfordshire, but I'm now at the stage where I can get the bike out of the shed, point it in the vague direction of the woods, and a route will just unravel in front of me. In five years of riding here I swear I've never traced exactly the same route twice, whether intentionally or not.

The semi-urban riding around West Yorkshire, as I remember it, is rather different given that the trails are more constrained within built-up areas; small clumps of woodland hidden in the snickets and ginnels between housing and industry. Less about meandering along, following your nose, and more about knowing how to link up hidden



I apologise to anyone whose garden I might end up crashing through

little bits of genuinely techy trail into a properly entertaining ride.

It's funny, I'm not even there yet, but in my head I'm already retracing tyre tracks I laid down in the mid 90s, remembering particular little challenges, like that awkward root section, or those tricky rocks that were so treacherous in the winter slime. Will they still seem as challenging with 140mm of suspension travel and disc brakes? Are they as good as I remember? It's funny, sections are vivid in my head, and yet the bits between to link them up are completely gone. As a result, I've been spending a lot of time staring at maps, attempting to fill in the blanks.

While this reboot is carried out, I

need to apologise in advance to anyone whose garden/shopping precinct/office car park I might end up crashing through in the coming weeks and months. That'll be me with the confused look on my face muttering, "When I were a lad this were all singletrack."

So long as a few of the old favourites remain and, more importantly, I can find them, I'll be good to go. And if the memory fails me, I can always just jump on Strava, stalk the local riding talent and rob some of their best routes. Pride dictates that'll only be a last resort though. Didn't have that when I were a lad. Back then we had to find our own way. King of the what? See, I'm getting into character already...





IMAGE TAKEN BY TOM JERVELL (BIKETREKS TEAM) ON A RIDE OUT IN LOUGHRIIGG, JUST 20 MINUTES FROM THE FRONT DOOR OF OUR AMBLESIDE SHOP

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BORN AGAIN RIDER

After years off the bike, veteran mtb snapper Geoff Waugh has caught the bug again

Call of the mild

Be thankful for the docile delights of British riding

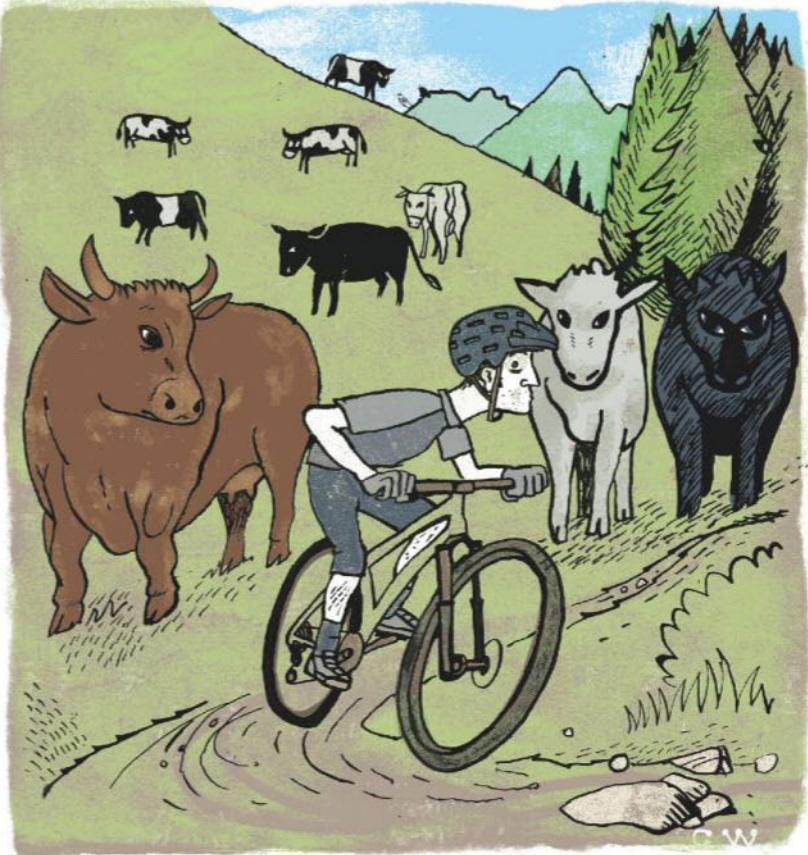
Leafing through an old All Terrain Bicycle magazine recently, it struck me how lucky we are to ride on this isle of ours. The piece described an attack by a mountain lion on a lone Los Angeles mountain biker. Is there anything worse than a feral dog nipping at your ankles? It seems so, particularly if you live in California.

Wildlife at home seems tame by comparison. At certain times of year I ride down the river into clouds of midges, but that's hardly going to make it onto a shortlist of the world's deadliest biker attacks. Scottish midges, on the other hand, are the undisputed heavyweights of the insect world. If you want to win a war, then drop a few bags of those little feckers on the enemy and it would be game over, double quick.

A previous editor of this magazine actually had a serious phobia of cows. I had no idea about this, until one sunny day on a ride along the South Downs Way. "Come 'ere and stay close, let me get the other side of you," he suddenly blurted out. "Why?" I replied. "Because those cows scare the crap out of me!" I was shocked. I chaperoned him through the meadow to a gate and well out of bovine harm's way. I'd never considered cows dangerous, and then I read about instances of the odd farmer being trampled to death. Crikey! Now, getting to the trails through a field of young bullocks seems fraught with danger. They are looking at me, and the brown one looks a bit tasty.

On a weekend to Belgium I saw cattle that looked like they had been in the gym and on the 'roids. Every muscle was bulging. I wasn't about to take a chance. But it gets better. In Africa, accompanied by said editor, I was riding ahead when I spotted a large male boar beside the track. Then I noticed the family of piglets rootling by his side. Panic mode! We had to ride past the boar and if he had thought we were threatening his young, we were toast. Have you ever had to outrun a wild boar? Exactly.

In Australia, it seems the smallest of flora and fauna inflict the most damage. Take the brilliantly named Spurge plant,



They are looking at me & the brown one looks a bit tasty

which has very pretty white flowers. The sap inside these little beauties is called 'latex' and can cause serious inflammation of the eyes, nose and mouth, and even blindness. Then there's the Lawyer, Barbed Wire or Wait-a-While vine. This one has sharp, barbed thorns that are extremely difficult to disentangle oneself from should one have the misfortune to ride into them. Wait-a-While refers to the fact that it is better to go back in the direction you came from, rather than to attempt to push on through. It seems every tick and small insect has the ability to inject a toxin that goes directly into the nervous system. And that's not even counting the visible stuff like snakes, cassowary birds and dingos. Strewth!

At least in Canada the dangers are obvious. We know from Merry Melody cartoons that bears are ferocious things with huge teeth designed to eat honey and do us wrong. My first live sighting of a bear was under the chairlift in the Whistler Bike Park. Three of them sauntered down the trail looking as cute and cuddly as can be. Still, I was glad I was dangling far above — I had been shown some huge claw marks in the door frame of an outhouse where we were staying.

So, really we don't have it that bad. A yappy dog, a few teeth marks in your ankle, a diversion around the cow field. It's hardly Bear Grylls territory, is it? Any of them would be preferable to being blindsided by a gazelle at full chat. Give me stinging nettles any day of the week.





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★ STAR LETTER ★

AS EASY AS MTB...

It's my 16th birthday in a couple of months' time. I finished my GCSEs a couple of months ago and cannot wait to get back out on my bike. That's easier said than done, though. I put it in for a service and realised how much work it needed. After buying a hundred magazines and books, I have now worked out that I can do the basics without paying the extortionate service fee.

I have also worked out that my bike is too small for me, so I have delved deep into my university fund to buy myself a new hardtail. I can't wait for the day I get it. I have already planned out a few places to go before taking it home.

In the meantime, I've been borrowing bikes off (very kind) people to go and explore. It's the best decision I have ever made.

All these hours have been worth it. I hope other people can discover what I have over the last few months as I have got more and more into mountain biking.

I wish them good luck in their awesome adventures!

Ciarán Good

KEEPING CAPRA CLEAN

I've hit the order button on a Capra AL1 today in a moment of weakness (hope your review soon backs my decision up!). Given that the bike should be delivered mid-August, I've got time to think about frame protection and maybe minimal mudguards of some sort — although I don't want to spoil the look of the bike.

Personally don't mind a bit of mud, but was thinking more about keeping the bike tip-top (well, for as long as possible). Are you able to make any useful recommendations? Should I buy helicopter tape, perhaps, or Mucky nutz?

Pete Reed

Ed — For ultimate protection, ship the frame to Invisiframe.co.uk to be swaddled in clear heli-tape. As for mudguards, we like the POWA-products.com Dfender, the Mudhugger.co.uk and the extended versions of the flexible plastic brace guards.

WHY GO SHORT?

I have a question about the Grand Canyon AL 5.9 in size L. The tester said a short stem would be better. Why is a short stem better and which length of stem would the tester choose?

Sebastian Strohnschneider

Ed — A shorter stem will help improve control in two ways. Firstly it sharpens the steering response and reduces the front wheel's tendency to flop to the side. Secondly it will move your weight back from the front axle on steep descents, making it much harder to go over the bars. As for the ideal length, there's no hard and fast rule, as it also has to give a comfortable reach when seated, but perhaps try a 60mm.



A shorter stem makes for a more responsive cockpit

WHO'S THE REAL ROOKIE?

What every mountain biker really wants is to convert their non-biking friends into hardcore shredders. So, I thought I'd take on the challenge. I picked a few mates and we all went to a trail centre.

When we got there I started my lecture on the trails. "Just follow the signs," I said, and thinking everything would be OK, sped off, getting nice and low in the berms.

After finishing the route, I waited

YOUR LETTERS

for several minutes, and then shouted their names. I heard two simultaneous replies of "here", one to my right and one to my left.

I asked another, more experienced, rider if he'd seen anyone: "Yeah, we passed some chaps tangled in a bush."

"This is the last time I take rookies to a trail centre," I replied. Moments later they trundled straight past me. While catching up, I wondered, "How come they're together, given that I heard two separate shouts from different places?"

I asked, "Where did you go?" They simply replied, "We followed the signs."

Later it hit me. They did follow the signs — I didn't! I strayed on to a black run. Ah! That's why I was quicker. But what about the two shouts? It's a valley! It was an echo! It was me making the rookie mistakes — but obviously I didn't tell them that!

Owen Brewster

ULTIMATE ALL-MOUNTAIN?

I'm shopping for a new all-mountain/enduro bike to replace my old steed. I have shortlisted the Nukeproof Mega AM, Giant Reign 1, YT Capra and Canyon Strive Race as possible contenders.

I would like to know how you think these five bikes match up to each other, and which, you believe, outshines the others and why. I know you rate the Capra and Strive highly but you haven't picked an outright winner between these two, nor tested them against the Mega and Bronson.

Like a lot of riders, I'm looking for the Holy Grail of one bike to do it all, and one that is as future-proof as possible, what with wheel sizes, geometry and all manner of things biking currently in a state of flux.

Of the five bikes above, which would you pick as the ultimate all-mountain/enduro bike and why?

Dave Humbleby

Ed — This sounds like a 15-page test rather than a quick letter reply! For sheer do-it-all versatility and out-of-the-box capability, we'd choose the Strive Race. But the Capra and the Reign are also brilliant bikes that we would also be more than happy to have hanging in our garage. It's a tall order, but try and get a quick ride on them all before you make a final decision.

GOING ELEVEN... GRADUALLY

I'm very keen on the newly released Shimano XT 11-speed groupset, but my wallet can't seem to get equally enthused.

Can I ask if you can upgrade in two stages? For example, could I run the 11-speed cassette, rear mech and chain with my existing 10-speed chainset? Alternatively can I run the new XT chainset with a single up front and retain my existing 10-speed set-up at the back or am I, as I suspect, going to have to save up for longer and do the whole upgrade in one lump?

Jamie Stogden

Ed — Good news, Jamie! You'll be pleased to know you don't have to commit all in



one go. Yes, you can buy the 11-speed cassette (it'll fit your existing freehub body), chain, rear mech and shifter and run it with your 10-speed chainset. This is the way we'd go, as you get the wider gear spread to run with a single ring up front.

DROPPER FITTING

I've just got a new Pinnacle Ramin Six, and I have been looking at potential dropper posts for it. The seat tube is 27.2mm. I think I'm going to get the KS eTen, but how on earth do I fit it?

Reuben Ind

Ed — The Pinnacle seat tube is actually 31.6mm, with a shim to reduce it to 27.2mm. Remove the shim and you'll have a much wider choice of dropper posts. To fit, zip-tie the remote cable along the down tube and up the seat tube.



OLD BLOKES WHO SHOULD KNOW BETTER

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WHO Kristan McClure **WHERE** Blacka Moor, Sheffield **WHEN** June 2015 **HOW** OTB using rocks to stop at 30mph. Hole down to the bone with surgery needed to patch it up.



WHO Colin Martin **WHERE** Castlewellan, N.Ireland **WHEN** June 2015 **HOW** Jumped off in style, dislocated middle finger.



WHO Chris Pringle **WHERE** Cillenn Colossus in Cheviots Northumberland **WHEN** June 2015 **HOW** Both wheels washed out from under me on a grassy descent. Eleven stitches; surgery to remove sheep poo from the wound.



WHO Jeremy Stevens **WHERE** BikePark Wales **WHEN** June 2015 **HOW**: Over the bars on the qualifier drop for Vicious Valley. I didn't qualify... Four broken ribs, crushed vertebrae.

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Every day, mbr's forum is awash with advice, stories and gossip. Here's what you've been talking about this month.

What is it about summer riding that makes it so great? Is it the sunshine? The long days? Or even the dodgy tan lines?

I find everyone else on the trails to be more affable — you get into conversations with people at every single section break — the atmosphere is really nice.

sc1858

Very early rides just as the birds wake up. There's no one about and it's warm but not too hot.

BlackMantra

It's great to get out on dry trails and feel the benefit of maintaining your fitness having slogged through the winter mud for the last six months.

Mongoosed

Not having to wash the bike when you get back!

Flaps

It's more acceptable to have a beer earlier in the day after a ride.

Snake Plissken

Warmer rain, clearer skies for those fantastic views of the North York Moors, more daylight for riding. Oh, and no mud, snow, ice.

Gunwitch

It's the fact that it's possible to go out the door at 7am and ride all day until 8-9pm without needing lights. Or go for a post-work blast without using lights. Or go for an all-night ride starting at dusk and finishing at dawn, as it's no longer than a normal day ride. Basically, summer opens up opportunities!

DaMilkyBarKid

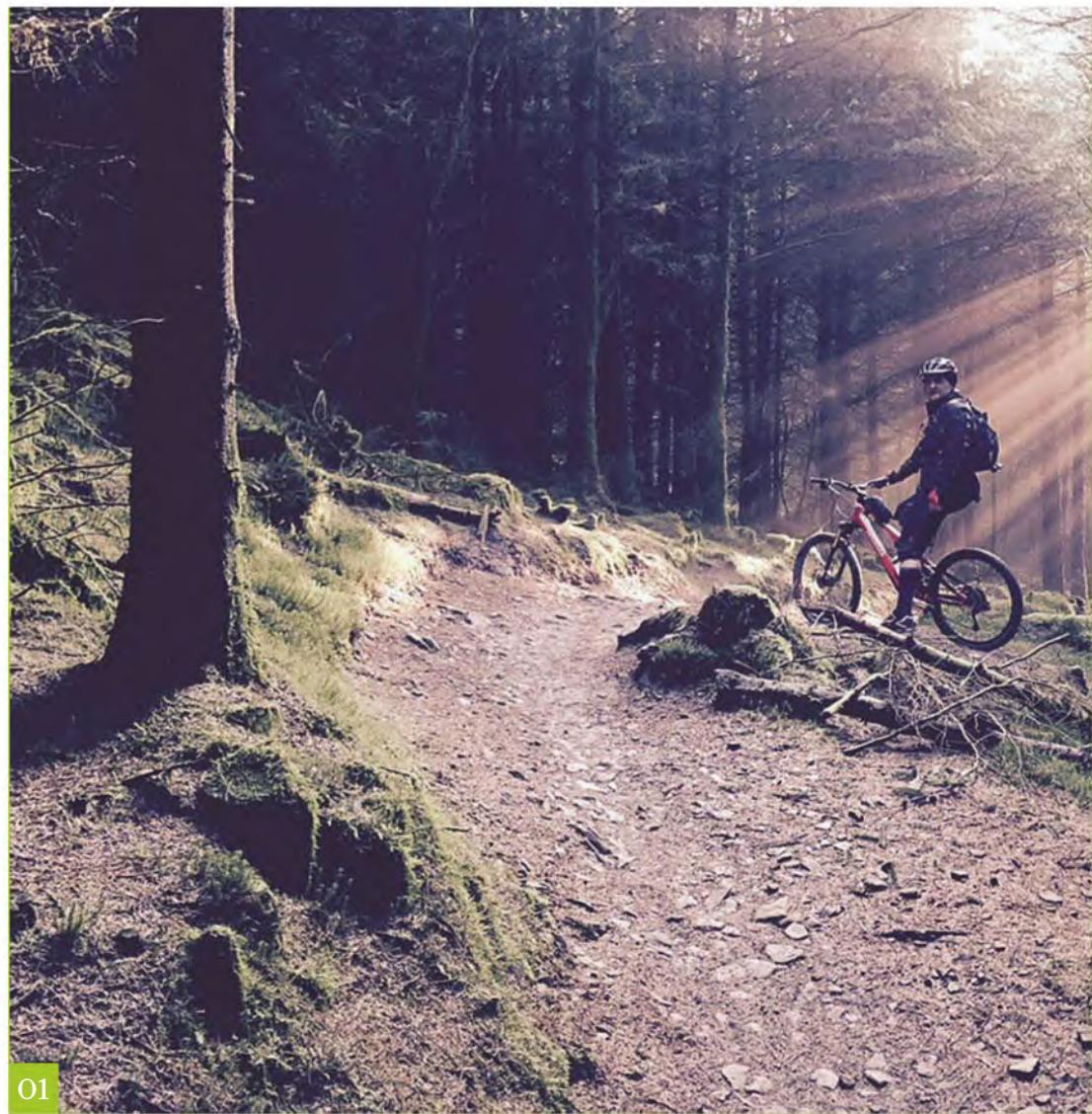
Nettles stinging your legs, Brambles ripping your top, flies in the mouth... Sorry, I read the question wrong.

M65

NEXT MONTH

HAVE YOU EVER TRIED INTRODUCING A FRIEND TO MTB. HOW DID IT WORK OUT?

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O1



O3



O4



YOUR PHOTOS



05



- 01 Shafts of sunlight at the Twrch trail
Photo: Lee Edwards
- 02 Beware of the black stuff on the North Yorkshire Rosedale loop
Photo: Neil Cooper
- 03 Sutton Bank's Paradise Trail living up to its name
Photo: Steve James
- 04 Andy Fowler riding into the sunset at Dalby Forest
Photo: Harry Melbourne
- 05 The first ride on a box-fresh Canyon Strive
Photo: Bobby Thompson

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IMPACT PROTECTOR

THE WIGHT STUFF

A short ferry trip across the Solent lies an island blessed with top-notch natural trails, sweeping coastal views and a compact gem of a trail centre run from a shipping container...

Words: Anna Glowinski Photos: Roo Fowler







The truth is, I never set out to write this story.

I wasn't looking for new mountain biking locations. I simply wanted to spend time with a friend who had moved away, and our mutual love of bikes made it inevitable that we would end up squeezing in some riding.

But my experience left me itching to go back... and equally determined to spread the word about riding on the Isle of Wight.

Mountain biking on the island is a mix of the familiar and the unusual. There are woodland trails and hand-built jump lines, as good and as much fun as you'll find anywhere. But there are also clifftop views, beachside rides... and a bike park run from a shipping container. Nothing on the island is ever *quite* how it'd be elsewhere in the UK.

You can see the land for the whole of the ferry journey from Lymington Pier to Yarmouth, and it feels as though the island is close enough to swim to. Yet the sensation of crossing water, albeit for a short amount of time, creates an instant holiday feeling. Just a few hours from London, we drove off the boat feeling like we were leaving everything behind, and the only thing ahead of us was freedom.

We were going back to spots I had previously visited, and we'd be shown some new ones too. I knew that there was some fun singletrack, and a downhill area with some sizeable jumps which I couldn't wait to head back to. We met up with a mountain biking guide from Island Cycling Adventures to make sure that there was no riding spot left undiscovered and, sure enough, James was a born and bred local rider who knew the island like the back of his hand. First on the agenda was to make the most of the evening light and try the trails in the west. ☐



Heather-clad hilltops offer wide-open views and full-throttle speed

Cycling guides need to adapt to whatever their customers want, whether that's road riding epics or gentle tours of the main sights. 'Mountain biking' can mean different things to different people, and James was clearly delighted as it became evident that we were looking for proper mountain biking trails. We were all wanting to experience the same things: singletrack, hills, views, and perhaps even a few jumps if time allowed. This was his opportunity to show genuine mountain bike enthusiasts exactly what the Isle of Wight had to offer!

For a stunning sunset ride, your best bet is to park in Fort Victoria to the west of the island. We took a lungful of salty air as we rode out of the car park and up an extremely steep path. The loop that we were aiming to fit in took us up the cliffs, along the beach and past the famous Needles; three stacks of chalk jutting up from the sea in a dramatic row.

BEACH CRUISING

To start with, we went around the back of some fields, through a typical Isle of Wight holiday park and down a wooden boardwalk, pushing out both wheels to land a small drop onto the beach. The early evening light bounced off the long, sandy beach with views of Portsmouth and finished at a calm, steely grey sea.

Cycling on sand is rarely a lot of fun, but this time it just added to the holiday feel. We wasted a load of energy skidding and drifting along the



The jungle look: tendrils hang from a tunnel of green

beach. We headed over to the rock pools and continued our journey, balancing over the rocks and trying not to put a foot down in a pool. It was silly and funny and definitely worth the effort for the small stretch that we covered. Then it was time to clamber up onto the promenade, cycle past a row of colourful beach huts and head up onto the cliff.

Once again, things got pretty steep pretty quickly. There wasn't much scope for taking in the view — for one, we were mostly under a tunnel of trees and, secondly, we stayed out of the saddle, pushing the pedals down and looking ahead. From ➔



Sand, sea and cycling: the perfect holiday mix



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Fallen trees provide the perfect woodland obstacle course

here I was really grateful to have a guide as we wove around the back of houses and along paths next to fields, before bursting out into the open area of gorse land at the top of the cliff, opposite the Needles. The trails between the low bushes were comprised of small, round stones that squeak as you ride over them and will have you down from the slightest of front-heavy turns. The smooth, marble-like quality of stones a couple of inches deep forced us to keep our weight central and our steering gradual as we rolled over some small, swooping mounds towards what looked like the edge of the cliff.

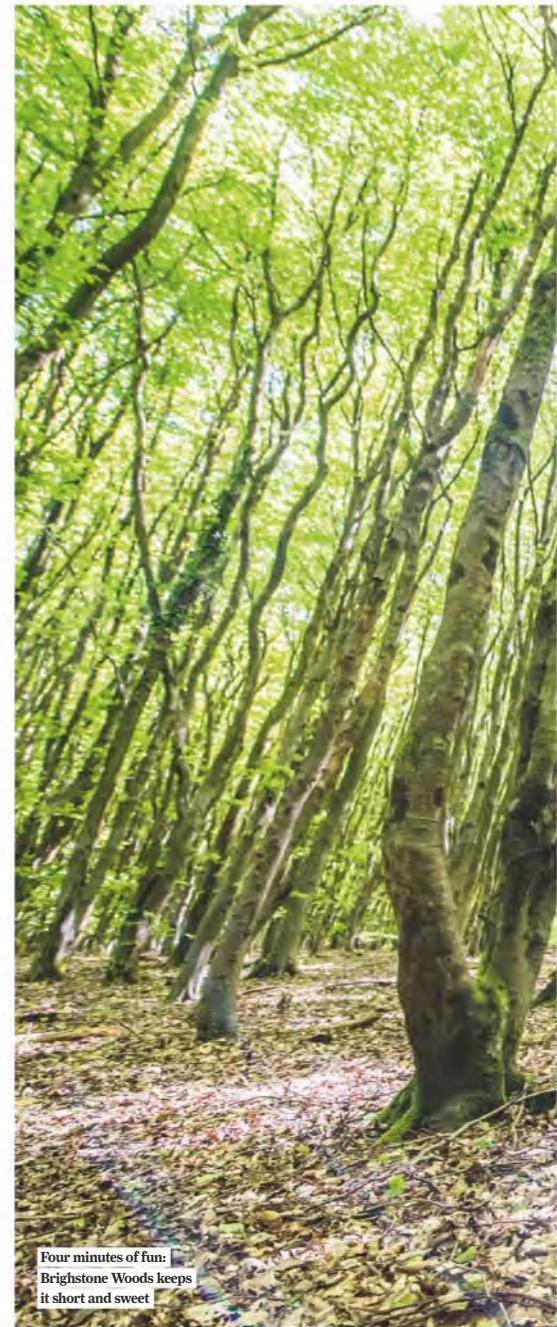
Unfortunately, we didn't have time to complete the full ride over to the Needles and down onto the multi-coloured sand beach. I didn't mind – it's good to keep an undiscovered part of the island to come back to on my next trip.

I'd already had a taste of Brightstone Woods and Grammar's Common from my first visit and I was really excited to share it with some new people, discover more trails with the help of a guide, and

BRIGHTSTONE WOODS OFFERS THE SORT OF FOUR-MINUTE TRAILS THAT REMIND YOU WHY YOU GOT INTO MOUNTAIN BIKING

get some snaps too. We all met in the Jubilee car park near Brightstone, which is the best place to park for immediate access to the woods.

Brightstone is set in the chalky downs that run east and west across the island. We started our ride avoiding the fire road, choosing to access the trails via some mildly technical climbing. We were surrounded by tall, thin trees that appeared to be topped with a glowing, green ceiling, and the ground was loamy with regular, exposed tree roots. The track took us to the top of the fire road that was running parallel to us, and the majority of the Brightstone Woods trails start from the top



Four minutes of fun: Brightstone Woods keeps it short and sweet

of this road, making it simple to do repeated loops and choose a different descent each time.

The most famous trail here is named 'Ho Chi Min' and is typical of the type of riding here. It starts with a small bomb hole that you can drop into with speed and pop out of, sending you shooting fast onto the singletrack. The trail is mostly natural, carved across the hill from regular riding by mountain bikers. The turns have naturally formed low and soft from left-behind roost, and man-made features appear intermittently in the form of small kickers and slightly reinforced berms. Although there was



Snaking singletrack cuts through the trees



Riders on the storm: pedalling away from a grey wall of rain



nothing drastically technical, we were kept on our toes by the off-camber slant of the trail and the polished tree roots. The knack was to stay planted against the angled pull of gravity, yet ready to unweight completely to glide over the roots. We were riding fast, and with good visibility of the trail ahead were able to prepare in good time for any features.

All over Brightstone Woods are the sorts of four-minute trails that remind you why you got into mountain biking in the first place. It's all about high speed 'whoop whoop' fun, and by the end you're grinning from ear to ear. We didn't stick around for too long as we had more to ride and see, but it would be easy to while away a whole afternoon here and still not ride everything it has to offer.

FARM FRESH

The Tennyson Trail is the Isle of Wight's much used tourist trail along the downs, and it is easy to jump on it from Brightstone and head to another riding spot. We were out on the trail, completely exposed, as the clouds broke and the rain suddenly thundered down. We were led to an old shipping container with a key left in the door, and we let ourselves in for shelter. James told us that this was the top of the Isle of Wight's only bike park, Chiverton Farm. Luckily for us, the landowner's son and main trail builder, Sam, came to find shelter at the same time.

Chiverton Farm isn't big, but it is perfectly formed, and we found ourselves pushing into some of the best-built turns I have ever ridden. It's the kind of fun where, if you ride with a good group of

friends, you can push yourselves and each other to find your limits, likely taking a few spills along the way.

Our final location was the one I had been sold on when I first visited the island. Once again, it is within riding distance of Brightstone and Chiverton Farm, along the Tennyson Trail. It was mostly back the way we came and then a turn down the nicely named Strawberry Lane. We climbed a gate, crossed a field and entered Grammar's Common.

The Common is a slightly more downhill-orientated trail than the riding we'd sampled elsewhere. It's a condensed spot of man-made, steep trails, with a push up afterwards, and finding it for the first time was a big surprise for me. Having previously heard nothing about



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Chiverton Farm's
got rollercoaster
trails aplenty

FOR THOSE WHO LIKE A BIT OF AIRTIME, THERE IS AN ANGEL OF A JUMP LINE, SHOWCASING 20 SIZEABLE GAP JUMPS

mountain biking on the Isle of Wight, to find these trails built by real-life mountain bikers — experienced mountain bikers at that — was genuinely unexpected.

The main tracks are a lot of fun and not necessarily anything more hair-raising than most of the local enduro trails I frequently ride in England (or 'the mainland', as I got into the habit of saying). No trail is more than two minutes long and they take in floaty root sections, loamy berms, drops and extremely tight switchbacks through the trees. For those riders who like a bit of airtime, there is also an angel of a jump line, showcasing no fewer than 20 sizeable gap jumps, step-ups and drops. For those who prefer to watch such antics, all the tracks are within a stone's throw of each other, so doing so won't take you far from your own riding.

On the way back to the Jubilee car park, it struck me that all of the main riding spots are within

pedalling distance of each other. Each location is worthy of a day in its own right, but for the sake of variety, you can spend a couple of hours in one place and then pedal for half an hour or so to ride the next. Each spot is condensed, so you can loop around as many, or as few, times as you like before moving on.

I am a keen traveller and lover of variety — discovering new places is, after all, a key part of mountain biking — so it's rare for me to feel a pull towards a place that makes me want to keep coming back. In lots of ways, the riding here mirrors that available at home, comprising a mixture of natural trails and those hand-built by enthusiasts, making the most of the land to hand. Combine this sense of homeliness with a touch of a holiday feel, and you have somewhere wonderful that feels like a little home from home. I have already booked in my next trip and I can't wait to return! **mbr**

CHEVY'S WHERE IT'S AT

It was a real stroke of luck bumping into Sam Hodgson, the landowner's son and main trail builder at Cheverton Farm trail centre.

The schoolboy, who has been known to throw down double backflips on 60-foot jumps with Isle of Wight legends Blake and Ray Sampson, has the freedom to drive a rented digger across the land during his summer holidays, creating trails that blend accessibility with imagination.

Chevy, as it is familiarly known, is the only official trail centre on the Isle of Wight and offers riders the choice of green, red and black-coded, cross-country loops. These loops are open permanently and occasionally play host to a cross-country or enduro race for local enthusiasts. Maintenance of the trails takes place when Sam swaps the digger for his dune buggy.

Although Sam himself prefers the more freeride areas of Chevy, his family fully understand the need to create good, fun singletrack trails that everyone can enjoy. Maps of the loops can be found on the farm website at chevertonfarm.co.uk.



At Chevy Farm, Sam's
the man who can



Rode my Lefty at the
Chevy and the Chevy
was dry



NO SHORTCUTS

We didn't make your bike so you can talk about it. Or look at it. Or tinker with it. We made your bike so you can forget about it. Because when it's just you on the kind of trail that makes your heart pump so loud you can hear it, the best bikes are the ones that disappear, and let you experience the thrill.



This month's routes

WHERE TO RIDE AND EXPLORE

01 HARD ROUTE

LLANGYNOG, BERWYN HILLS

51km (32 miles)

Take a tour of the home of the UK's most successful mountain biking family: the Athertons. Starting from their former home town of Llangynog, this is a grand day out in the spectacular Berwyn hills. It's a long ride, with plenty of ascending, so pack your climbing legs, wait for a break in the weather, and enjoy the experience. There's quite a bit of doubletrack for the first two-thirds of the ride, so the rolling should be quick.

Take a lunch stop at Llanarmon Dyffryn Ceiriog, then ready yourself for the technical singletrack treat back to Llangynog. Combine this ride with a day, or evening, uplifting at the fantastic Revolution Bike Park, and the trail centre at Llandegla (see p68), for a cracking long weekend of riding. Revolution Bike Park was the training ground of the Athertons before being bought and turned into a bike park. Now you can ride the same trails on which Gee, Rachel and Dan honed their craft, and ogle the incredible quarry line used for various Atherton videos. Keep heading west, and there are further options to explore at Antur Stiniog and Snowdonia.



LOCATOR



02 EASY ROUTE

LAP OF LADYBOWER, PEAK DISTRICT

18km (11 miles)

You can tell how popular the riding is in these parts by the amount of tyre tracks you'll find yourself following. And you won't have to put much distance in before you realise why it's proved such a big draw. This is a great little ride that just keeps getting better. The final climb is a tough slog – but it's doable. And it lines you up for a great finale: first with a fine traverse around Derwent Edge and then a top-notch descent to Cutthroat. The short, sharp drop to the Ladybower Inn rounds it all off nicely.

03 MEDIUM ROUTE

GRIZEDALE EAST, LAKE DISTRICT

17km (10 miles)

It's amazing how much good 'natural' riding there is in Grizedale. Its old lanes and bridleways conceal plenty of challenge for those that seek it. This is quite a short, sharp blast around the forest; though it can be extended easily for those that want more. It's basically a three-up, three-down with all three descents being absolute belters: rough, rocky yet totally rideable – and it would be tough to choose between them for the best of the bunch. The climbs are reasonably friendly too, and there's always the great Lakeland scenery to distract you.

04 HARD ROUTE

BARDEN MOOR, YORKSHIRE DALES

49km (30 miles)

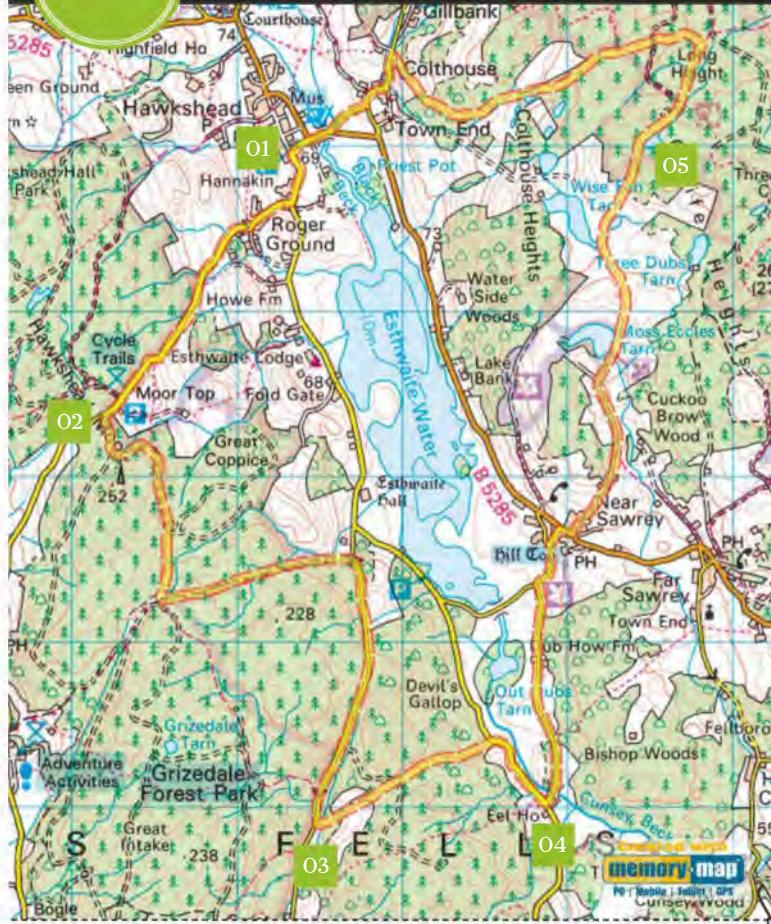
This is a long, scenic and fun loop that offers plenty of ups and downs, yet is never overly technical: classic Dales riding at its best. It's the sort of ride to save for a good day and then to take your time over, stopping in a pub or teashop at half distance. The climbs are stiff; and they add up to 1,200m over the whole route. But they are all doable – though you'll need to be good onto Rylstone Fell; the descents are fast and furious and offer plenty of respite. There's a fair bit of tarmac at the start and finish so don't let the distance put you off.

GRIZEDALE EAST, LAKE DISTRICT

17km (10.5 miles)

Maps created with Memory-Map © Crown copyright Ordnance Survey 100034184

MEDIUM
ROUTE

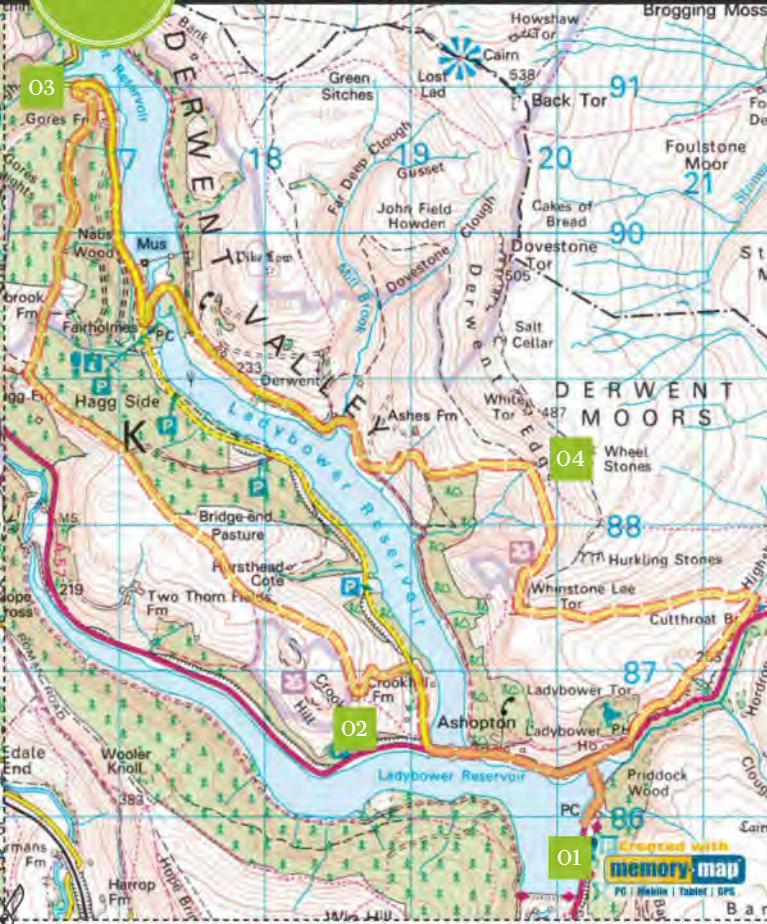


LAP OF LADYBOWER, PEAK DISTRICT

18km (11 miles)

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EASY
ROUTE

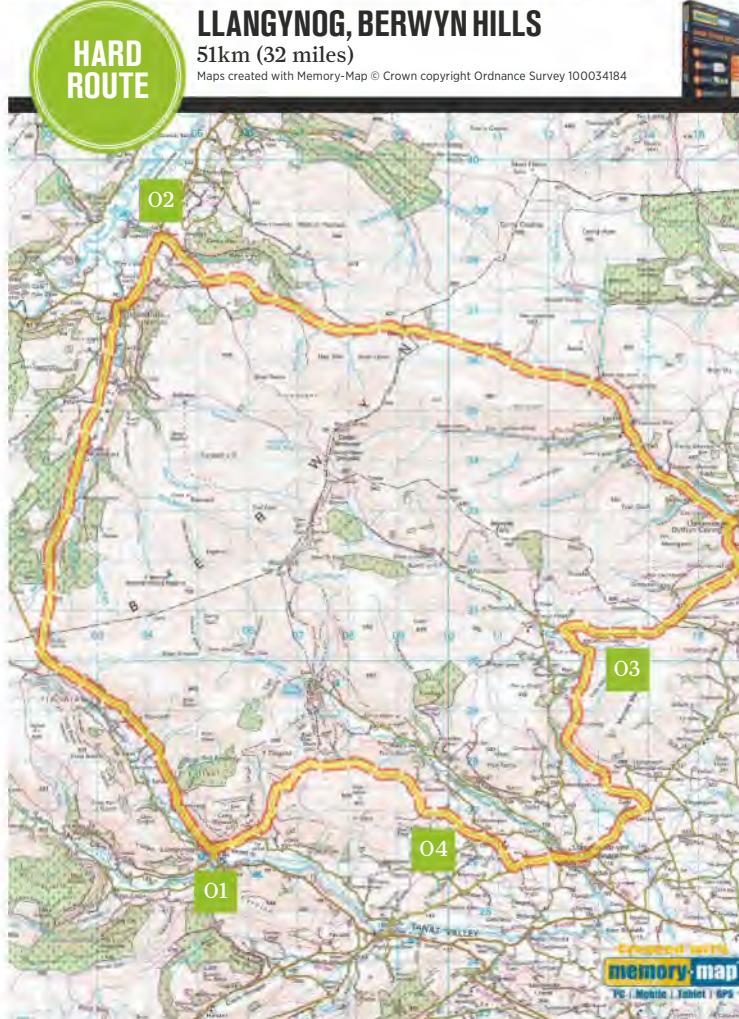


HARD
ROUTE

LLANGYNOG, BERWYN HILLS

51km (32 miles)

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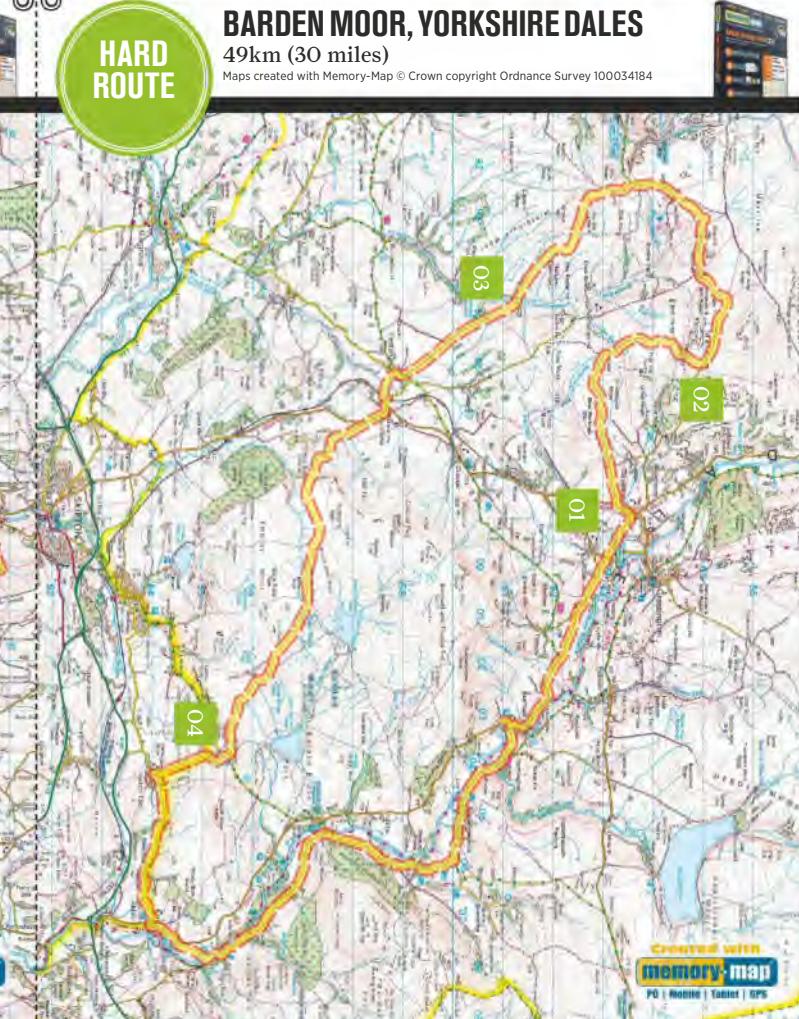


HARD
ROUTE

BARDEN MOOR, YORKSHIRE DALES

49km (30 miles)

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EASY ROUTE

LAP OF LADYBOWER, PEAK DISTRICT

18km (11 miles)

WAY TO GO

01 START (OS110/SK202859) Heatherdene car park

Turn R out of the car park and cross to follow a cycle path along the pavement. Turn L (still on the cycle path) to cross the bridge. Take the first R (Derwent Valley Dams), then take the first L to zigzag up to Crook Hill Farm. Go through a gate into the farmyard and then bear R again, through another gate, onto a rough track.

02 (SK186868) Crook Hill Farm. Distance so far: 2.8km

Follow this alongside a wall, through another gate and alongside the wall again. Now fork L to follow posts to a gate and keep SA, through a succession of gates, before dropping down the side of a wood. Ignore a BW to the R, and continue to another junction, where you turn R to a major track. Now keep SA to drop past Lockerbrook Farm and climb slightly before descending steeply to the road.

03 (SK166910) Road at Derwent Reservoir. Distance so far: 8.3km

Turn R to the roundabout then L to follow the drive beneath the Derwent Reservoir dam. Follow this R along the banks of the Ladybower Reservoir for 2km and then, after kinking around an inlet, look for a gate on the L that leads on to a flagstone path signed footpath but actually a bridleway. Climb steeply on flagstones and cobbles, keeping ahead by a barn, to continue to a gate beneath Derwent Edge.

04 (SK198883) Derwent Edge.

Distance so far: 13.9km
Go through and turn R to contour around the hillside before climbing slightly to a narrow pass by Whinstone Lee Tor. Keep SA (actually slightly L) to follow a waymarked BW all the way down into Highshaw Clough and when you see the road directly ahead, bear R onto a narrow BW that then leads down, through two gates, to the road by the Ladybower Inn. Turn R then L to finish.

TOTAL DISTANCE: 18KM (11 MILES)

TOTAL ASCENT: 590M (1,936FT)



MEDIUM ROUTE

GRIZEDALE EAST, LAKE DISTRICT

17km (10.5 miles)

GETTING THERE

The ride starts from the main car park in Hawkshead (OS97/SD353980). This is two miles south of Ambleside, to the west of Lake Windermere. It's easiest reached from J36 of the M6, via the A591. For rail access, you can take the train to Windermere and catch the ferry across the lake.

BEST TIME TO GO

Year-round trails but plenty of standing water at wetter times. A good one for a bad day as it's not too high and spends most of its time in the trees.

MAPS & GUIDEBOOKS

Memory Map V5 OS Landranger (1:50,000) Region 4

OS Landranger (1:50,000) 97 Kendal & Morecambe

OS Explorer Series (1:25,000) OL7 The English Lakes South East

Lake District Mountain Bike Routes by Tom Hutton (Out There Guides)

REFRESHMENTS

The Tower Bank Arms in Near Sawrey is perfectly placed before the final climb.

FACILITIES

Plenty of choice for food and drink in Hawkshead.

There's a Youth Hostel in Hawkshead, 0845 371 9321, yha.org.uk

For B&B try the Red Lion, 015394 36213, redlionhawskhead.co.uk

Hawkshead TIC, 015394 46525

OTHER OPTIONS

You're not far from the Dunnerdale Hard we did in the June 2015 Issue or the Ambleside Medium from December 2014. Or have a blast around the North Face Trail.

WAY TO GO

01 START (OS97/SD353980) Main Car Park, Hawkshead

Turn L out of car park and L again at top. Continue for 300m and turn R (Grizedale) to climb steeply. Keep R after 300m, then swing L to continue climbing all the way to the top. Pass Moor Top car park on your R then a footpath on the L, then take next L onto broad track, going around a gate.

02 (SD342963) Track/road Junction above Moor Top. Distance so far: 2.4km

Follow the main forest track along, dropping all the time, and after exactly 1km, where the track bends sharp L, keep SA on a BW. Follow this to an offset x roads and bear L onto a rough, broad track that drops to a road at the bottom. Turn R and climb then drop, and after 1.7km of tarmac, look for a waymarked BW on the L (easy to miss).

03 (SD354938) Road/bridleway Junction. Distance so far: 6.8km

Follow a grassy track across a field to a gate. Go through and climb up through the forest, keeping SA at a x roads of trails. This leads to another great descent and eventually the road. Turn R and then next L to climb up to Near Sawrey. Turn R again and R onto the main road. And then, after 100m, immediately before the pub, turn L onto a narrow lane.

04 (SD370956) Near Sawrey. Distance so far: 10.5km

Follow this up through gates, merging with a track from the R and then keeping R to climb to Moss Eccles Tarn. Keep ahead with the lake to your L and keep L at a fork to continue to a gate above Wise Ean Tarn. Keep SA to a gate on the edge of the forest. Keep SA for 200m and bear L onto an easy to miss BW.

05 (SD374980) Bridleway junction. Distance so far: 13.4km

Follow this down, SA another track, then down again to a junction where you bear sharp L to climb steeply. Continue SA at a x roads and continue over the top and down out of the forest, enjoying a long descent to the road. Turn L and then R and R again to Hawkshead. Cross the bridge and turn R to the car park.

TOTAL DISTANCE: 17KM (10.5 MILES) TOTAL ASCENT: 570M (1,870FT)

HARD ROUTE

LLANGYNOG, BERWYN HILLS

51km (32 miles)

HARD ROUTE

BARDEN MOOR, YORKSHIRE DALES

49km (30 miles)

WAY TO GO

01 START (OS98/SE082611) Main car park, Burnsall

R out of car park, then around to the L. Follow the B6160 for over 5km, then turn L (Crake, Skipton) to the B6265. Turn L, climb the hill then turn R. Keep SA onto a track, and at a gate, fork R then L across the moor. At a wall, turn R to follow it, and continue between walls, then across another moor, then between walls again. After the barn, keep the wall to the L and continue to the road.

02 (SD960649) Road on Malham Moor.

Distance so far: 11.4km
Turn L, go through a gate and turn L. Go through the buildings and turn R then L to follow a wall. The track then leaves the wall and becomes grassy. Go through a gate, wind around a stream and join a broad track. Follow this down to buildings and turn R to the road. Turn L and take the second track on the L. When you reach open moorland, fork L and follow an intermittent track, eventually dropping to a bridge at Winterburn Reservoir.

03 (SD946612) Footbridge, Winterburn Reservoir. Distance so far: 20.6km

Climb away and at the junction at the top, keep SA to drop to Hetton. Turn R then, after 300m, L onto a BW. Follow this down then up. Then turn R on the road to Rylstone. Turn R for 500m, then L onto a BW. After 600m, turn L and climb steeply onto Rylstone Fell. Keep SA across the moor, first on rough singletrack track then on a shooter's track. Follow this, keeping R at one fork and L at the next, to the road.

04 (SD037555) Halton Moor. Distance so far: 33.1km

Go SA onto a rough track and follow this down to Bolton Abbey, where you turn L. Follow the road up to the entrance of Sandholme, where you turn R onto the drive. Follow this down and R to cross the bridge. Climb to the road and turn L to Barden Bridge, where you turn R to Appletreewick. Turn L back to Burnsall.



GETTING THERE

The route description starts from the main car park at Burnsall (OS98/SE082611). This is about five miles south-east of Grassington, on the B6160.

BEST TIME TO GO

A good year-round blast that will hold up in most conditions.

MAPS & GUIDEBOOKS

Memory Map V5 OS Landranger (1:50,000) Region 4

OS Landranger (1:50,000) 98 Wensleydale & Upper Wharfedale, 99 Northallerton & Ripon

OS Outdoor Leisure Series (1:25,000) 2 The Yorkshire Dales; Southern & Western Areas

Yorkshire Dales Mountain Biking: the South Dales by Nick Cotton (Vertebrate Publishing)

REFRESHMENTS

The Angel at Hetton is a good bet, or there's tea shops galore in Bolton Abbey.

FACILITIES

Basic teashop/kiosk in the car park or others in Burnsall itself.

For a post-race pint, there's the Red Lion in Burnsall or the New Inn, Appletreewick.

B&B in the New Inn, 01756 720252, the-new-inn-appletreewick.com

B&B in the Red Lion, 01756 720292, redlion.co.uk

Youth Hostel at Kettlewell, 0845 371 902, yha.org.uk

Grassington National Park Centre, 01756 752774

OTHER OPTIONS

Check out the short, sharp Easy we did in the July 2015 Issue; or the Hard from Horton in Ribblesdale in May 2014.

WAY TO GO

01 START (OS125/SJ053261) Llangynog

Follow the B4391 NW out of Llangynog for around 7km. Not far from the summit, turn R onto doubletrack. Fork L after 200m and follow track to meet road at Blaen y cwm. Continue SA on road along valley until you reach Llandrillo. Turn R onto B4401 Llandrillo and follow for 2km.

02 (SJ042385) B4401 junction. Distance so far: 15km

Turn R at phone box just before stream and follow past farms to join BW. Go L after 2km at trail crossing to skirt R of small wood. Follow doubletrack for 6km to climb onto moor. Continue SA and descend past shooting hut to meet road. Stay on road until you reach Llanarmon Dyffryn Ceriog. Turn R and follow road. Bear L at first turning, ignore next turn on R and continue up and over hill to junction. Turn sharp L and continue to tight R turn.

03 (SJ128302) Track junction on bend. Distance so far: 35km

Join track on L and skirt hill on doubletrack. Go through farm and onto road, then turn R at T-junction. Go R at x-roads. Stay on road to Llanrhedraed-y-mochnant. Go SA through town, past the Plough pub on Market St, and take the first R once you leave town after 1km. Keep L at fork and climb on road to meet road.

04 (SJ096269) Bridleway, Glan hafon. Distance so far: 45km

Follow doubletrack, then grassy track to descend to trail junction. Turn L on BW and follow switchback descent. Cross stream by stone wall, follow doubletrack for 100m through gate, then pick up singletrack through woodland and rocks to meet road. Bear R and follow back to Llangynog.

TOTAL DISTANCE: 51KM (32 MILES) TOTAL ASCENT: 1,750M (5,741FT)



A GOOD
Old Fashioned

SALE

IN-STORE AND ONLINE





LLANDEGLA'S NEW LINES

A wager was all it took to spark a visit to this popular north Wales trail centre, but the question is: who'll be buying lunch?

Words & photos: Sim Mainey

In association with



TRAIL CENTRE FOCUS



During the long drive back from a day of scaring ourselves at BikePark Wales my mate Tim asked if I fancied heading over to Llandegla for our next trip. I guffawed... while picking grit out of my teeth. Seriously? Llandegla? How could he even mention Llandegla after the highs we'd experienced at BikePark Wales? The truth is, my experience of Llandegla has not been entirely positive. My last visit was five years ago, and all I remember is pedalling. Pedalling on the ups, pedalling on the flat and pedalling on the downs. Pedalling non-stop. I don't remember experiencing the joy of freewheeling, nor receiving sufficient reward on the downs for the effort I'd put in on the ups. I do remember the cafe was pretty good though. Which is important, for reasons I'll come to shortly.

Tim's been riding at Llandegla since before the trails were built. He's seen the development of the forest over the past decade and he's convinced my feelings about the place will change if I give it another chance. Sensing my hesitation, he comes up with a wager: "Right, if you give it another go, and still don't like it, I'll buy you lunch. Hell, I'll even drive us there and back. If you do like it, you can buy me lunch. How does that sound?" Like music to my stomach. We had a deal.

Llandegla is not that high on my mountain bike bucket list, but it must be doing something right — it's a midweek morning when we roll up and already the car park is filling up nicely. As well as the hardcore work-dodgers, there are classes of school kids, groups on coaching courses and families on hire bikes.

Sitting on the north Wales border, it's not ➤



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"As long as they fall
away from the trail,
I'll be fine"

I AM CONCERNED IF THERE ARE KIDS ON THIS TRAIL, IT'S NOT GOING TO DELIVER THE GOODS FOR ME

really a surprise that so many people come here — it's easy to get to for anyone living in Liverpool or Manchester, has somewhere decent to eat, a quality bike shop and there are skills courses available to help progress your riding. Whether you come on your own, with mates, or with the family, there's something for everyone. Well, in theory there is; I'm still not convinced there's something for me.

Tim begins his pitch for a free lunch with the trail map. The trails at Llandegla have been open for 10 years and, looking at the trailhead map board, there certainly are many more than when I was last here. They've also built a skills area, freeride zone and pumptrack within easy reach of the centre. Impressive stuff. Time to see how it measures up.

The climb out of the car park is wide and gradual. We ride past the skills area — which does look like it could be fun — and through a gaggle of exhausted school kids in their football shirts, helmets hanging off the back of their heads and bikes strewn on either side of the trail. While I'm



Christmas trees line
the trail as new routes
loom ahead

pleased, and envious, that kids have the chance to get out and ride mountain bikes during school hours, I am slightly concerned that, if there are kids on this trail, it's probably not going to deliver the goods for me. On the upside, that free lunch seems more of a certainty.

VIEWS MAKE A RIDE

The trail levels off. The top of the hill is lined with saplings; miniature Christmas trees, rather than the tall old growth. From here you can see out onto the surrounding hills and down to the Cheshire Plain, helping to give you some sense of place within the world. This is one thing that's

always bugged me about trail centres; the lack of views. For me views make a ride. They provide the chapter markers that help cement it into your memory. Scalextric-style start and finish rides, through the trees, can be fun but they lack the context that makes you really appreciate a place. My memories of riding at Llandegla were of feeling that I could have been in any copy and paste forestry plantation. It had nothing unique, and no special sense of identity.

The red and blue trails split at this point. We continue on the red, Tim keen to show me some of the newer sections. The trail narrows and the downhill begins. It is reasonably open; big ➔



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CAN BE A POSITIVE

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WHILE THE FOREST MAY BE BLACKER THAN ANTICIPATED, THE ACTUAL BLACK TRAILS ARE DEFINITELY LIGHTER

sweeper berms, small drops, and lots of lumps and bumps to pump, give the impression of a crushed-rock roller coaster. There's nothing too scary other than the speed, and some loose gravel on a few corners. A few front tyre slides keep me on my toes and I try to stifle a giggle — I don't want Tim to hear that I'm having fun.

It's here that the trail enters the forest proper. It's dark. Light struggles to penetrate the dense tree cover, and what little that does illuminates the crushed rock trail; a pewter ribbon in the gloom. My eyes strain to make out what's coming up next, and as the trail heads further into the dark the speed increases. I pull over to get my camera out. A minute or so later, I hear Tim coming; the low rumble of tyres on the trail dotted by short gaps of silence as he flies over a series of jumps. It's like Morse code. My request to do it just "one more time" is met with little resistance.

Like any commercial forest, the trees are planted in neat lines. The lack of obvious gradient, the unrelenting dark and the repetition of the trees, all conspire to throw your sense of direction, making it difficult to place yourself. It's also verging on the claustrophobic. Perversely, I quite like this feeling; if there are no views to enjoy, I might as well feel engulfed by the forest and embrace the darkness.

STUFFED WITH TRAILS

While the forest may be blacker than I anticipated, the actual black trails are definitely lighter than expected. Whoever marked the trails when they were built was a little over-cautious. None of the black trails are true blacks; more like reds. Given the number of beginners Llandegla attracts, this is probably a good thing, but for experienced riders



it pays to not be too put off by the rather large warning signs at the start of every black section. But just because the trails aren't as demanding as they make out, doesn't mean they aren't fun. Zig-zagging, rising and falling, the trail continues. There's no let up, and while not technically challenging, complacency is punished. Complete attention is required at all times.

Llandegla forest is stuffed with trails. Some are now decommissioned and some are in the process of being re-routed, but it's not unusual to find a lone berm sat in the woods, abandoned, unloved and unridden. There are tales told of the Athertons

having built some trails in the forest that were destined to become a freeride area, but were never opened as they were off-the-scale bonkers. Locals whisper of a 4x course, built deep in the woods, for Dan Atherton to practice on. Whether they still exist, or ever existed, I'm not sure. Neither is Tim, but the myth does lend an element of intrigue to the place.

Despite a red arrow directing us left, we head right, up what was a bermed section of trail. Tim's local knowledge wins again as we top out next to a boardwalk section. The wood and wire trail takes us over the stumps and carcasses of long dead

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trees. Trees that may well have ended up as the pages of this very magazine.

I'm starting to get a bit hungry. As it stands Tim is still buying lunch, and I start to think about what I should treat myself to from the cafe. A bacon buttery and a slice of flapjack would be nice...

The reason why we Brits have taken so well to trail centres is, as I see it, three-fold. We suffer more than our fair share of crap weather, so having somewhere to ride that is reasonably unaffected by rain is generally a good thing. Secondly, we like quick fixes and easy hits. Sure, we're willing to work for them, sometimes, but being honest, we'd happily accept an uplift if it was offered. We'd go for thrills over effort every time, and we'd rather spend time with the saddle in the down position than the up. Finally, we like being flattered; made to feel better than we really are. And it's here that Llandegla gets me.

The next piece of trail starts with a hideous little climb, but then gives back that effort in the form of a gradual descent, that's steep enough to ramp up the speed before throwing in a line of tabletops. I'm not the world's best jumper, but I'm being sent from takeoff to landing with no real effort. I feel like a riding God. This is the feel-good factor in full effect. This is the reason I'd come somewhere like Llandegla, and I'm guessing it's the reason so many people keep coming back.

We're dropping back towards the centre now, and I've got to admit, I'm not sure who will be coughing up in the cafe at this point. We ride past the centre and back up the first climb.

While big rides are all fine and well, there is something about just mucking around in the woods that feels so rewarding. Railing round a few corners, boosting off some lumps in the ground, dropping off a rock or two; just dicking about on



two wheels and seeing how much further, faster or higher you can go each time. That's exactly what it feels like in the skills area. Jumps, drops, corners; the lot. All of which can be hit in one 30-second lap. Cheap thrills: I love them.

We park our bikes among the throng of school kids who have now flooded into the centre. A group that has been out doing skills coaching pulls up, and three lads who have been out on hire bikes skid to a halt just in front of us. Llandegla might not be every mountain biker's paradise, but it's doing a damn fine job of getting bums on seats and bikes on trails. The trick, for those who have a higher adrenaline threshold, is to understand that this is a trail centre designed and built for the masses. To take the brunt of a million tyres and to allow every rider that visits to leave with a smile on their face. That's no easy task. Sure, I've not really challenged myself too much, or ridden at my limit, but I have smiled, I have felt rewarded and I have felt flattered. By adjusting my expectations, and understanding Llandegla for what it is, I think I've finally got it.

I get out my wallet. "So, what do you want?" **mbr**

LLANDEGLA

THE TRAILS

■ GREEN 5km,

30-45 mins

■ BLUE 12km,

1-1.5 hours

■ RED 19km,

2-2.75 hours

■ BLACK 21km,

3 hours

PICK OF THE TRAILS
The Red with Black options is the best choice for those looking to blend distance with thrills. Finishing off in the skills area is a must.

SLEEPING AND EATING

The award winning on-site cafe does a good line in locally sourced grub, from slices of cake through to a BBQ. The lamb burger was particularly fine. coedllandegla.com

FIXING YOUR BIKE

In the same building as the cafe is Oneplanet Adventure, which can sell you everything from a gear cable to a Santa Cruz Nomad. Hire bikes are available, as are demo bikes, making it a good place to do some back-to-back testing before splashing your cash on a new bike.

oneplanetadventure.com

WHAT TO RIDE

The key to getting the most out of Llandegla is to come with the right tool for the job. A hardtail or short-travel full-suspension bike will make the trails a lot more entertaining and give you the biggest reward for your efforts. Pinch-flats are possible if you get a little too excitable on the jumps, so, if you haven't already, take the opportunity to go tubeless.

IMPROVE YOUR RIDE

If you feel your skills need sharpening, then Llandegla is a good place to get that edge. Ex-downhill racer, now Enduro champ, Neil Donoghue offers a range of courses at the centre aimed at more advanced riders who want to step up their game. neildonoghuecoaching.co.uk



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Q&A

This month: how to keep on top of your suspension, and why you shouldn't shout at your kids...

THE BIG QUESTION

Can I service my fork and shock at home?

Q I'm not particularly mechanically minded, but I don't mind getting my hands dirty and could do with saving a few quid. What can I do to look after my suspension?

Sarah Marshall, email

A If you want things to last then you can't avoid regular servicing, especially with things like forks, shocks and dropper posts. All of these components are under a lot of stress, and often sit directly in the firing line of all the crud we ride through. They also range from fairly complicated to very complicated, but it's worth learning how to service them because it's always far cheaper than replacement. Frequent servicing also

keeps them functioning properly, so you'll get maximum benefit and enjoyment.

For forks and shocks in particular, an annual service should be considered the absolute minimum. Supplement this with regular lower leg and air can services — say two to three times a year. This might sound like a lot, but if you ride regularly, it is still likely to be less than the manufacturer recommends.

On top of this, you should undertake a regular pre/post ride cleaning and maintenance routine. What did you say? You don't have one? If that's the case, then even if the rest of your bike is hanging, it makes sense to look after the expensive bits. Trust us; you'll go faster and save money as a result!



Looking after your suspension is a lot easier than you might think

FOUR THINGS YOU CAN DO AT HOME

CHECK THE FORK/SHOCK PRESSURE REGULARLY

This is the most basic aspect of fork, shock and dropper post maintenance. Regularly check the air pressure using a shock pump. Some forks and shocks need topping up every week while others will last a month or more. As a rule of thumb, the higher the pressure, the more likely it is to lose air and the more often it will need to be checked.



LUBE THE SEALS

There are loads of sprays out there designed to clean and lubricate your seals. These are generally silicone-based, are really quick and convenient to use and do make seals feel way slicker. We don't know the exact composition of these sprays but some have better lubricating properties than others, most probably due to a higher silicone content — we've been impressed with Bruno Deo and Duck Smart Bullitt 33.

A less convenient, but cheaper and more effective option, is to use suspension oil. Applied with paper towel, there is less risk of overspray, which can contaminate your brake pads, and it works better for longer. A bottle will also last longer, as it's not diluted with propellant.



DO A SIMPLE SERVICE

You might be a novice when it comes to spanner work, but servicing your shock's air can and your fork's lower legs really isn't that hard. Have a butcher's at our workshop

videos at mbr.co.uk/mountain-bike-videos/workshop to see if we've covered your fork or shock. You may well be surprised by how easy it is to do it yourself.

YOUR EXPERT

AL VINES
Using current workshop labour prices, Al has potentially clocked up just shy of £2 million in labour charges for various employees over the years. He still manages to look like a giant, bearded, grey haired toddler that doesn't have a halfpenny to his name.



HOW TO CLEAN AND LUBE FORK SEALS

Here are three quick steps to keep your seals in good condition. Aim to do this before every ride — it only takes a couple of minutes.



01 Clean the seal thoroughly. If there's any dried on mud, use a clean, damp rag and a toothbrush to get into the nooks and crannies. Once spotless, dry thoroughly with a clean, soft cloth.



02 Lubricate the seal and stanchion of the shock, fork or dropper. Compress the suspension/post and you'll be left with a ring of oil, and probably dirt too.



03 Wipe off any dirt and excess lube that appears on the stanchion. Repeat steps 2 and 3 until no more dirt appears. Leave a very light film of oil on the stanchion by doing the final wipe with an oily towel. Careful not to overdo it on the fork as any excess can run down the leg onto the brake, causing contamination.

Got a question about fixing your bike? Email mbr@timeinc.com with 'Q&A' in the subject line

FLIP THE BIKE UPSIDE DOWN

This is the easiest bit of maintenance you'll ever do. Flip the bike onto its saddle and bars. Leaving it like this for a while will allow the lubricating oil in the lower legs — thanks to gravity — to pool around the seals and foam rings and give them a good soaking. Properly lubed seals reduce stiction, wear, and do a better job at keeping out filth.



QUICK FIXES



For accurate tyre pressures you can't beat a digital pressure gauge

TYRE PRESSURE

Q The gauge on my track pump is really hard to read and I'm not sure it's accurate. How can I be sure I'm getting the right pressure every time?

Francois, email

A Unfortunately most track pumps have crappy gauges. If you care about tyre pressure, and it seems you do, then you can get hold of a dedicated digital pressure gauge such as the Topeak Smarthead. It only costs £24.99 but is way more accurate than a track pump. Go to extrauk.co.uk to find a dealer near you.

SCRATCHED FRAME

Q My boy knocked my bike over in the garage the other day and it landed on the mower, scratching the paint on the top tube. I'm really annoyed as it's my pride and joy. What's the best way to fix it?

James Parnell, email

A Go easy on the lad James, I know we get attached to them, but it's just a bike. If it's a steel frame then cover it up fairly sharpish to prevent rusting. Otherwise, unless it's more of a gouge than a scratch, it's only aesthetics. Some manufacturers might be able to supply touch-up paint, or you can go to a model shop,

to try and find a good match. Clean the scratch thoroughly with alcohol, or similar, and build up the layers of paint gradually.

BAR-ENDS?

Q What are these things for? Some riders seem to sport these on their bars, do I need them in my life?!

Grant Page, email

A Bar-ends give an alternative position for your hands, which can help when climbing, as you can weight the front end of the bike more easily and benefit from extra leverage. Wide riser bars have all but killed the bar-end though, as they already provide greater leverage and their back sweep leaves bar ends sticking out at an odd angle. The other problem is that they have a tendency to get hooked on trees etc and slam you on the ground, or worse still, onto the bar-ends and then the ground! If you run flat bars, have a penchant for climbing, and can handle a little sniggering behind your back, why not throw fashion to the wind and give them a try?



Sort noisy disc brakes

Make screeching pads and rattling rotors a thing of the past — here's how

Disc brakes are bloody brilliant; it's a wonder we ever managed to ride without them. While being fairly maintenance-free and wonderful most of the time, there is one aspect of a disc brake that is bound to grate on even the most laid-back of riders: noise. This can come from the constant ting-ting-ting of a poorly aligned caliper, deal with contaminated pads and straighten a bent rotor. You won't need a lot of fancy tools, and you won't need to be a grand master in bike mechanics — all that is really required is patience, a little time and this here guide.

It's unrealistic to expect silent brakes all the time, but there are several things that can be done to quieten them down for a more peaceful time in the saddle. Here we show you how to properly align your caliper, deal with contaminated pads and straighten a bent rotor. You won't need a lot of fancy tools, and you won't need to be a grand master in bike mechanics — all that is really required is patience, a little time and this here guide.



TOOLS FOR THE JOB

- Just some tool box basics — Allen keys, plastic tyre lever, isopropyl alcohol or disc brake cleaner and an adjustable spanner or rotor truing tool.

NEED TO KNOW

- TIME TAKEN 20-30min
- SKILL LEVEL Moderate
- MONEY SAVED £10-50
- GOT INTO TROUBLE? Your safety depends on your brakes so get a mate to double-check your work. Visit a bike shop if you really mess things up.

GET MORE

Watch a video tutorial by visiting po.st/NoisyBrakes

YOUR EXPERT

AL VINES
Using current workshop labour prices, Al has potentially clocked up just shy of £2 million in labour charges for various employers over the years. He still manages to look like a giant, bearded, grey-haired toddler that doesn't have a halfpenny to his name.



WARNING

Never touch a disc brake rotor just after riding — it's likely to be very hot!

O1 You won't be able to align the caliper if the mount is wonky. If the caliper just won't sit right, then the mount probably needs facing. The tools for this job are expensive though so leave this to your LBS.



O2 Remove the wheel from the frame or fork.



O3 Remove the brake pads, ensuring that you keep hold of any retaining clips and pins.



O4 Reset the pistons by pushing them back into their bores, as shown. Use something non-metallic, such as a plastic tyre lever. If you're still worried, fit some old pads and lever against them.



05 Refit the wheel into the dropouts. It must always go in straight, so either pull up on the wheel as shown, or sit the bike on the floor and put some weight onto the saddle as you secure the wheel.



06 Take the time to align the caliper perfectly over the disc by loosening the two retaining bolts (5mm Allen key) and moving the caliper by hand. View the caliper from above to get it lined up — sometimes there'll be a line down the centre of the caliper, which helps. Ensure the bolts are properly tightened and check alignment again before fitting the pads.



09 If the pads were contaminated, then thoroughly clean the rotor before fitting the wheel. Keep wiping with fresh paper towels and disc brake cleaner or isopropyl alcohol until absolutely contaminant free. This is a lengthy process — don't scrimp here or you'll trash your new pads. Pump the brake lever to move the pads onto the disc (this may take a few pulls on the lever).

10 If the brake doesn't run drag-free, then you need to manipulate the pistons. You'll be able to see which pad is rubbing. Grab the rotor and flex it slightly towards the rubbing pad while at the same time repeatedly pulling the brake lever. The space created by flexing the rotor over will allow the 'lazy' piston further out of its bore, while the rotor holds the opposing piston into its bore. With patience you should achieve consistently drag-free operation.

11 Bent rotors can be straightened with a small, clean, adjustable spanner or a disc-truing tool. Spin the wheel to check for misalignments and bend straight as necessary, just like truing a wheel. It takes time and patience, but most minor bends can be rectified.



12 Avoid using spray lubes and polishes near your discs or you may contaminate the pads. Either apply oil from a bottle, or cover/remove pads and rotors. If you do get oil, grease or polish on your brakes, clean them immediately and thoroughly with disc brake cleaner or isopropyl alcohol — you might get away with it as long as it doesn't reach the pads.



08 If there is any sign of contamination through lubrication, brake fluid or polish, the pads will need replacing. Ensure that the risk of re-contamination from weeping fork or brake seals is eliminated. Correctly fit the pads, including any retaining clips/pins.





THE ART OF FLIGHT

TABLETOPS AND DOUBLES

YOUR COACH

Olly Wilkins has been at the heart of the UK dirt jump scene for well over a decade, and has become the face of DMR bikes. He's spent hours behind bars getting airborne, and plenty more with a shovel in his hands creating opportunities to leave terra firma. Olly is no stranger to trail riding, so when not at the dirt jumps, he can be found bouncing around the berms and roots of the Surrey Hills. He is also one of the most enthusiastic, stylish and creative riders around.



Last month we showed you how to hop and drop, now it's time to put those skills to the test on a proper jump

Words and photos: Roo Fowler

Humankind has always wanted to fly. The urge to get air beneath your feet, to feel the freedom of floating above the ground is something that is ingrained within us.

It's the same on two wheels. Most of us, even after leaving the ground for the most fleeting of moments, experience a huge surge of adrenaline and get a big childish grin on our face. But for many, the fear factor proves a difficult barrier to conquer.

In this two-part series, we're tackling jumping head-on. With the expert guidance of dirt jump star Olly Wilkins we're going to break down the basics of hops, drops and jumps.

We covered the skills needed to hop and drop last month, and now you'll need to put those hard-earned skills to use clearing tabletops and doubles. Let's take a look at why those techniques are so important, starting with bunny-hops. There are two separate skills involved in the bunny-hop

It's all about staying in control as you drop back to the ground



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THE VIDEO**
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Jumping2](http://po.st/Jumping2)

JUMPING JARGON

■ TABLETOP

A jump that has no gap between the take-off and landing — just a flat surface.

■ TRANSITION

The curve from a flat trail to the top of the take-off. A tight transition has more of a pronounced curve, is more advanced to ride, but sends you higher. Both the take-off and landing slopes have transitions, and can be described as such.

■ LIP

The take-off. ■ **KICKY** A kicky jump has a tight transition with a steep final portion to the lip.

■ **BOOST** Pulling up hard on the take-off to go as high as possible.

■ SQUASH

The opposite of boosting, squashing is all about keeping the bike as low as possible over a jump.

DIFFERENT JUMP SHAPES

Jumps come in so many different shapes and sizes that the correct technique can vary considerably. Look at the examples below to see what we mean:



01 This jump is the worst kind to learn on; it's got a very kicky take-off and a steep, tight landing. It's almost like a spine in a skate park, and would require considerable skill to ride well, because the trajectory is almost straight up and straight down, and it would be easy to come up short or overshoot.



02 At the other end of the spectrum, this jump has no real transition to the take-off or the landing. This take-off won't send you very high on its own — you need the right technique (close to that of a bunny-hop) to gain the necessary height and distance to clear it.



03 Ideally, this is the kind of tabletop you should learn on. It has a gradual curve to the take-off, and a long, fairly flat landing. The lip will help you to gain air without bucking you over the bars, and there's little consequence in coming up short or overshooting the landing. Try and find a jump like this to learn on.

THE SPEED ISSUE

We now know that jumps come in all shapes and sizes, but it's also worth noting that the speed range at which you can successfully hit the same jump can vary considerably. With experience, you will realise that you can reduce your speed, pull up more to compensate, and yet still reach the landing. Likewise, you can race into the jump and actually push down on the bike, rather than pull up, in order to squash the jump. This is where tabletops come in handy; you can experiment with speed in relative safety.



that directly translate to jumping. The first is simply picking the bike up off of the ground. When it comes to jumps, the shape of the take-off can give you a head start, but there is always an additional element of body movement involved. Secondly, controlling the rotation of the bike in the air; starting with the front wheel high and progressing to a level position, or even front wheel down, as you move through the air is critical to safe jumping.

Moving onto drops, the primary transferrable skill is actually the landing. Once you reach the highest point of the trajectory, every jump becomes a drop. It's all about staying in control as you drop back to the ground and land in the safest way possible.

HOW TO: RIDE TABLETOPS

First of all, find a tabletop that doesn't have too steep a lip or too tight a transition. A low tabletop with a gradual curve to the take-off is far better for learning on than a tall one with a kicky take-off!



01 Take it slowly, there's no need to worry about reaching the landing just yet. Roll in towards the table out of the saddle with enough speed to get up the take-off and over the jump, but don't worry about getting air to begin with. You just want to get a feel for what the lip will do to the bike. Keep your body centred between the wheels and stay loose, with both your arms and legs slightly bent. It's worth pumping the bike a little as you roll in, as this will ensure you don't tense up and give you a mental picture of the suspension response.



03 As the front wheel approaches the top of the lip, your weight should be moving back and up — just as you would to bunny-hop an obstacle. The transition will naturally do some of this for you, but you may need to move your hips back slightly, straighten your arms and pull back on the bars. Think back to last month's lessons.



05 Keep your weight slightly rear of centre as you come into land. While in the air, avoid pulling the brakes as this will cause the front end to drop. It's a useful tool when your front end is too high, but don't try it while you're learning.



02 As your front wheel starts to roll up the transition, don't fight the bike. Keep your arms slightly bent and allow the front end of the bike to rise up the lip. To begin with, just get a feel for what happens to the bike. As you progress, you'll want to be preloading the bike on the approach so that you're starting to unweight as the front wheel leaves the ground. The faster you go, the earlier you will have to begin to preload the front end. If you think of the middle of the tabletop as a log in the trail that you are trying to bunny-hop, you should be able to work out when to begin the sequence of weighting and unweighting.



04 As your weight comes off the front wheel, it will naturally shift through your legs to the rear wheel. Once your rear wheel reaches the end of the take-off, you can push the bars away from you to bring the front wheel down and level with the back. Your legs should be bending to bring the rear wheel up into your body.



06 Aim to land with both wheels at the same time. Extend your arms and legs to meet the landing, then allow them to bend to absorb the impact. If you keep your weight slightly back with your hips behind the saddle, you can absorb more of the impact without the saddle getting in the way.

Once you feel comfortable leaving the lip, and controlling how the bike lands on the tabletop, gradually increase your speed until you reach the landing. You may also need to alter how much you weight and unweight the bike on the approach to, and up, the lip. This will vary according to the jump and your approach speed.

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HOW TO: RIDE DOUBLES

A gap! That's the only change between a tabletop and a double, but our brains often don't see it that way. Instead we see a chasm filled with broken glass, fire and sharks. In an ideal world, you'd have a double built to exactly the same size as

a tabletop, so you can simply swap from one to another, but this often isn't the case.

So how should you approach a double compared to a tabletop? The answer is simply confidence; you do not want to get your speed

wrong here, you need to assess the jump from all angles, visualise clearing it, and be confident in your approach speed and timing.

There are two proven methods you can use to gain confidence.

GET SUPER COMFORTABLE

Before attempting a double, repeatedly practise riding a tabletop until you're completely comfortable at a range of speeds. Ideally you want to be able to ride it faster or slower and be able to adapt your timing and body position in the air to compensate. If you have a range of tabletops available, ride them all. You should be reaching the landing every time without a problem.

PRACTISE, PRACTISE, PRACTISE

Experiment with landing front wheel first at the top of the landing. Have a go at pulling up to gain more height, or squashing it to stay low, but again, landing smoothly on the downslope. Practice and experience is everything in jumping. It's what gives you confidence, and confidence means success. The more jumps you do, the more you will use instinct and judgement rather than a 'hit it and hope' approach.



FOLLOW A FRIEND

This one is simple. If you can find a willing rider, follow someone of roughly similar ability to you, who already knows the jump, in order to judge your speed.

GO FOR IT!

Follow the above advice and you are in the right position to attempt a double. Aim for your first one to be around 4-6ft in length (a bike length or less) and only a couple of feet high at the most. At the end of the day, doubles are a bit of a leap of faith — be confident, stay loose, spent time assessing and preparing and then go for it!

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CANE CREEK DBINLINE SHOCK

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SPECIFICATION Weight: 370g including hardware • Sizes: 165mm to 215mm plus various eye-to-eye • Contact: extrauk.co.uk

Cane Creek's DBinLine is the lightest version of its twin-tube shock, but still gets independent compression and rebound damping circuits. The standard DBAir has an external reservoir, but Cane Creek has eliminated this from the slimmer DBinLine design and the weight saving is significant; it's around 200g lighter. It's not quite as light as the equivalent Fox or RockShox damper, but then it does have around 50 per cent more oil volume, which translates directly to improved downhill performance and reduced shock fade.

On the trail the DBinLine is very fluid, but a stabilising Climb Switch lever increases low-speed compression and rebound and is the best solution to increased pedalling efficiency I've tried. On top of four independent damping adjustments, the air spring can easily be tuned by adding volume spacers to increase bottom-out resistance and progressivity.

Rather than pushing oil back and forth through a floating piston, like you'd find in a regular Fox shock, the oil within a DBinLine circulates continuously through adjustable valving circuits. It also features a new flexible rubber membrane that separates the damper oil from the nitrogen-charged chamber that cleverly surrounds the shock eyelet area and compensates for oil displacement when the shock is compressed.

The upshot of all this technology is reduced stiction, and having tested it on several bikes, over as many months, my conclusion is this is the best performing trail bike shock available. Grip levels, off-the-top, are superb, as is the ability to track the ground and handle high-speed compressions when riding over repeated roots or rock gardens. Support, right throughout the stroke, can be perfectly tailored to how supple or poppy you want

the bike to feel — assuming of course you have a good idea what the dials do.

The DBinLine would be looking at a perfect score here but there are some quirks and reliability issues. One niggle is that equalisation between the positive and negative air chambers leads to a dead spot that's noticeable when the bike extends and touches down over really rough terrain. This flat spot isn't consistent but it did eventually become more pronounced on all the shocks I tested.

I've also witnessed various failures — shocks getting 'stuck down' or rebound damping issues — especially for heavier riders.

Cane Creek has a potentially class-leading product in the DBinLine. If we could be certain that sustained high performance was guaranteed from every unit, we'd be looking at a 10/10 rating instead.

Mick Kirkman



YOUR TESTERS



PAUL BURWELL

Just back from four days testing in Les Arcs, in the French Alps. Honed his skills and spills



ANDY McCANDLISH

Packing for a weekender on the Pivot fully loaded with Alpkit BikePacking bar bags and seat packs



MICK KIRKMAN

Recently seen ducking and diving getting photos of competitors on the inaugural Enduro2



JIM CLARKSON

Celebrated his birthday with a big off-road thrash round Romney marshes, the flattest part of Kent...



ROB HOYLES

Ex-motorbike journalist traded the Ducati for a Nukeproof Mega TR 275. The man with a plan

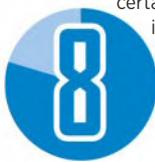
SHREDXS KIDS' FREERIDE JERSEY & DOWNHILL SHORTS

JERSEY £20 SHORTS £40

SPECIFICATION Weight: shorts 366g (age 5-6), top (Age 6) 100g • Sizes: Age 4-14
Contact: shredxs.com

Quality kids' mountain bike kit is hard to come by, especially for those below school age. ShredXS is a small, Scottish-based company, started by a family who noticed this gap in the market. The result is a range of hard-wearing, good-looking kit available in sizes down to age four.

The Freeride Jersey is light, airy and well fitted — although the sleeves perhaps came up a bit short on our 12-year-old tester



— and was universally liked. The thick 600-denier nylon baggy shorts proved to be extremely tough and protective, with hip padding, Velcro cinch adjusters and spandex panels for flexibility. Our tester found them a little stiff and abrasive however. That said, they're certainly bombproof. ShredXS is already working on a softer, more XC version of the short, so they might offer an improvement.

Andy McCandlish



SELLE SAN MARCO DIRTY NATIVE PRO SADDLE

£120

SPECIFICATION Weight: 160g • Colours: black/white, black/red • Contact: paligap.cc



The Dirty Native saddle is tuned especially for enduro, which means it's designed to be comfy enough for extended liaisons, with a shape that doesn't get in the way or hook up on clothing while moving aggressively around the bike on timed stages.

The Pro version, here, uses carbon-fibre rails, with an internal aluminium strengthening beam, and at 160g, provides a potentially useful weight-saving for racing. A dimpled,

grippy area helps when perching on the tip up the steepest pitches, and reinforced shoulder edges should protect from damage in a crash.

The overall shape is comfortable with well-placed dense padding and gel inserts, but the ride quality is definitely on the firm side — don't expect much squish or softness to isolate from trail bumps either from the rails or the sit bone pads.



The Native is as unobtrusive as claimed, but after a few times turning the bike upside down for trailside repairs, the rear of the saddle showed signs of scuffing, which doesn't bode well for long-term durability. The extreme weight saving might be important to top-level racers but a bit more comfort wouldn't go amiss for most users facing a long day in the saddle.

Mick Kirkman

SCORES ON THE DOORS

What mbr ratings mean
Our grading system explained

1

2

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10

1-4 Something's wrong. It's rare, but sometimes a product will have a design flaw or some other weakness that means we can't recommend it. Steer clear.

5-6 OK — one or two faults but it has potential.

7 Good — worth considering.

8 Very good — for the money, we'd buy it.

9 Excellent — a slight mod or two and it might be perfect.

10 Simply the best — we couldn't fault it.

DAINESE HYBRID KNEE GUARD

£69.95

SPECIFICATION Weight: 431g • Sizes: S-XL
Contact: windwave.co.uk

These Italian low-profile knee guards combine hard-shell technology with the comfort of a soft protector, hence the Hybrid name.

The rigid kneecap and shin plate are not massive, but they are thermo-formed from a shock-absorbing polystyrene, which is then covered with an anti-abrasive coating. Underneath is a light honeycomb, which is integrated within a layer of memory foam to form what Dainese calls a shock-absorbing sandwich.

The bulk of the Hybrid is made from a four-way stretch fabric, which is highly breathable. The back of the pad features a thinner Lycra material to improve comfort and boost breathability.

Dainese has gone to town on the fastenings — the hems are elasticated but also feature Velcro tags on the top and bottom, and silicone grippers on the inside. There's also a big diagonal strap for lashing across your calf. All I can say is they never moved once and I've worn them on some big Alpine rides, all over Surrey and even had a day trip to BikePark Wales. For a three-quarter



9

guard they offered a good level of protection and the abrasive coating does work — there's not a mark on them.

As a guard that you can ride in the UK or abroad, the Hybrid is lightweight and great value. However, I have a couple of issues. First, it took me a while to work out which leg is which,

simply because Dainese prints Italian abbreviations on the inside, rather than the more traditional L and R (SX is left, just in case you were wondering). Also, one of the straps is starting to pull away where it's stitched onto the side of the guard.

Paul Burwell



CYCLO UNIVERSAL BLEED KIT

£45.99

Contact: weldite.co.uk

Catering for Shimano, Hope, Avid, Magura, Tektro and Hayes brakes, this kit really isn't far off being truly universal, and I have so far tested it on three of those brands with complete success. There are labelled bottles and syringes, so you won't contaminate brake fluid and mineral oil when switching between systems, and it comes with every clamp, strap and hook you could need. It isn't cheap but it is a quality, do-it-all kit if you have more than one brake type in your stable.

Andy McCandlish

8

ANSWER PROTAPER CARBON SL BAR

£129.49

SPECIFICATION Weight: 216g • Width: 780mm • Dimensions: 12.75mm rise, 4° up/8° back • Contact: hotlines-uk.com

SL presumably stands for superlight since this new Answer carbon bar weighs just 216g in full DH width. That's 15 per cent lighter than the brand's standard carbon model but, thanks to a one-piece lay-up, Answer claims the strength and stiffness is high enough for any type of riding.

A rough grit-coating on the central bulge and at either end helps security for both the stem clamp and lock-on grips, without having to over-torque the pinch bolts.

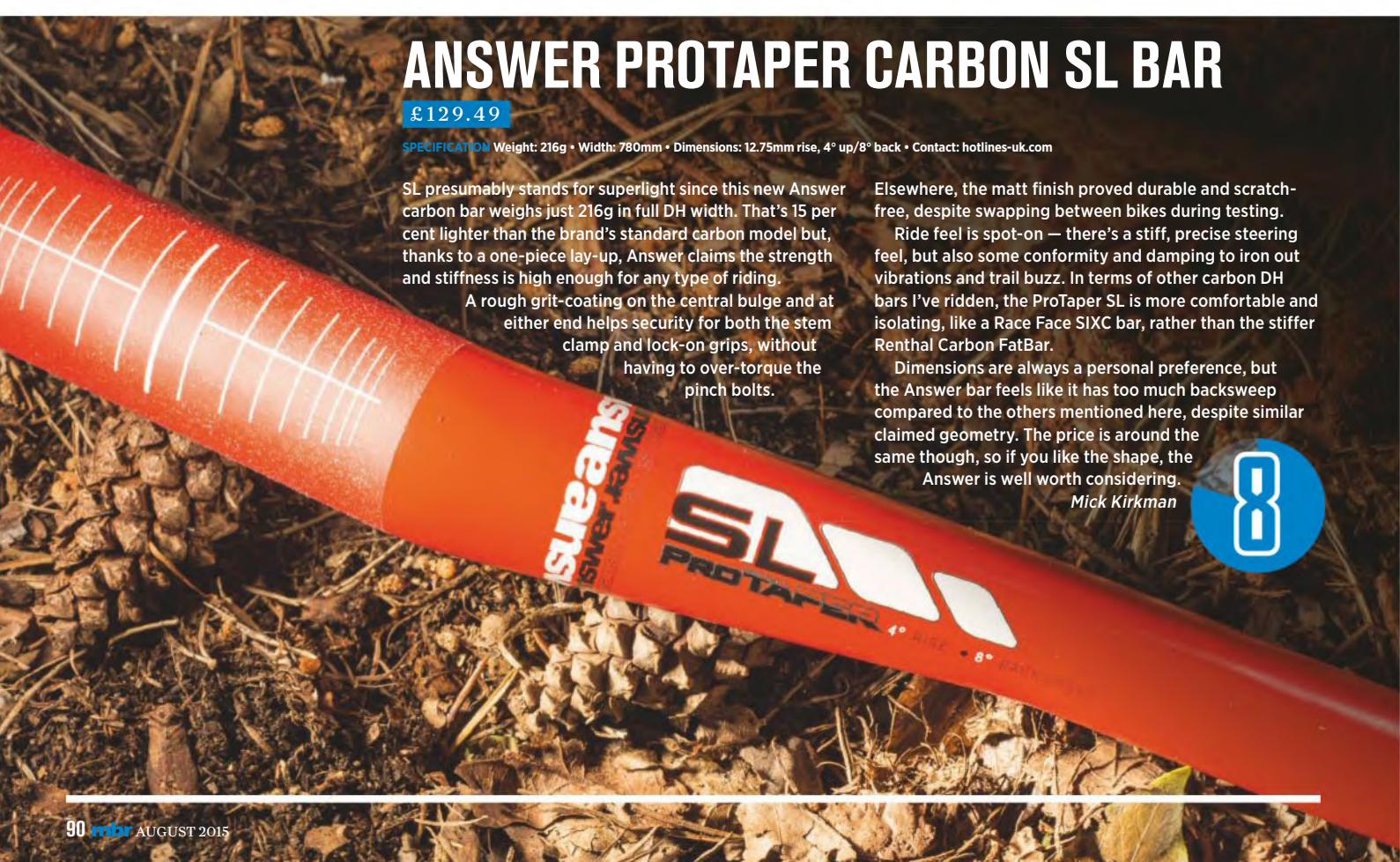
Elsewhere, the matt finish proved durable and scratch-free, despite swapping between bikes during testing.

Ride feel is spot-on — there's a stiff, precise steering feel, but also some conformity and damping to iron out vibrations and trail buzz. In terms of other carbon DH bars I've ridden, the ProTaper SL is more comfortable and isolating, like a Race Face SIXC bar, rather than the stiffer Renthal Carbon FatBar.

Dimensions are always a personal preference, but the Answer bar feels like it has too much backsweep compared to the others mentioned here, despite similar claimed geometry. The price is around the same though, so if you like the shape, the Answer is well worth considering.

Mick Kirkman

8





Going the Extra Mile

www.chainreactioncycles.com

Focused on **quality**.

WOLF TOOTH COMPONENTS DROP-STOP CHAINRING

£49 - £54

SPECIFICATION Weight: 48g • Sizes: 30, 32, 34, 36 and 38t • Colours: black, gold, red and blue • Contact: leveretproductions.com

I've been running Wolf Tooth Components' superbly machined Drop-Stop ring — coupled with a Shimano SLX Shadow Plus rear mech — for three months now and it's been utterly faultless. I've not had a single chain derailment in all that time.

Like all aluminium rings, the Drop-Stop is CNC machined with a crisp, precise finish across all the teeth. It also offers a solid and really close fit, when mounting on a crank arm. In terms of toughness, a good few clouts over logs and rocks haven't caused any bending, although, if

you're worried about that you could still run a bash guard.

Apart from increasing contact with the chain to improve retention, the narrow/wide design on the Drop-Stop also seems to clear mud better. The teeth don't leave much room for anything as they connect with the chain, pushing mud out, which is pretty handy considering most of my home trails are all clay.

Although the Drop-Stop is more expensive than many of its rivals, it's top quality and works perfectly.

Jim Clarkson



ALPKIT BIKE PACKING KIT

KOALA SEATPACK £65, POSSUM TOP TUBE PACK (MEDIUM) £50, AIRLOK DUAL 13L £11

SPECIFICATION Weight: Koala 286g, Possum 172g, Airlok 170g • Contact: alpkit.com

I've always enjoyed riding off into the hills for a couple of days with a load of gear. Carrying everything is a chore, though, and getting gear off my back and onto the bike has always been a top priority. For years I've run a BOB trailer, but Alpkit's new bike-packing kit has given me another option.

Between the three bags, there's just shy of 30 litres of storage — enough for a frugal overnight with compact and lightweight gear — and they are stable enough to tackle technical ground without adversely affecting bike handling.

The Airlok Dual is really just a 13-litre dry bag, but what makes it ideal for bikes is the stitched runners on the side, and 800mm webbing

for strapping to bars. I found it ideal for light clothing or a cooking kit, with the dual-entry meaning I didn't have to pull everything out to access items at the other end. At 11 quid, it really is a no-brainer.

The Koala is the same capacity, but attaches to the seatpost and saddle, like an outsized seatpack. With a tapered design to prevent rubbing on your legs, it had to be carefully packed to fill properly — for that reason, it is best suited to clothing and other easily compressed gear. The Koala isn't waterproof, but Alpkit makes a tapered drybag (the Airlok Tapered 13L), which is definitely worth getting if you want to keep things dry. It's starting to show

a few signs of chafing, and I've had to tape the wear areas, but to be fair this is the same for all off-road bike luggage.

With just a 1.7-litre capacity for my medium Possum top tube pack, I initially thought it was hardly worth bothering with, but after using it once I was converted. It's handy for all sorts of food, knick-knacks and smaller camping gear, and was instantly accessible. Like the Koala, the Possum is made from sailcloth, and is lightweight but extremely tough. It is available in three sizes to fit different frame sizes.

Andy McCandlish





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AMPLIFI ORION 12 BACKPACK

£90

SPECIFICATION Weight: 800g • 12 litre capacity • Colours: black, lime, forest, black/rose • Contact: paligap.cc

Amplifi is a German brand, and like compatriots Evoc, it makes a range of packs, knee guards and travel luggage. The Orion 12 is Amplifi's mid-sized trail pack and, as the name suggests, has 12 litres of storage capacity, but to be honest it feels like more. The main compartment has a mesh pocket and a clip to hang a reservoir — one isn't included — with left or right strap routing for the hose. Piggy-backing that is another big pocket with a handy key fob, pump holder and a separate tool roll, which is great for keeping everything in one place. There's a small front pocket for snacks, wallet and a silk-lined pocket at the top for your phone. Two zipped pockets are located further down — one contains a helmet holder, the other a waterproof rain cover. On the side you can pull out two elastic loops to

secure extra gear like kneepads, and there are two additional mesh pockets on the sides, with a mini purse built into the waist belt.

Fully loaded, the Orion is super-comfortable, and even on some of the steep descents I rode recently in the Alps, it barely moved. The padded shoulder straps, and wide waist belt, keep it centred on your back — my only issue is the mesh back panel is not as breathable as some I've tried. It gets a bit clammy around the waist area, maybe a consequence of the thickness and width.

The quality is as good as any I've tried, and it's crammed with features, but it's a bit expensive for a 12-litre pack without a reservoir. You can buy the test-winning Camelbak Volt for £99, and it has a £30 Antidote reservoir included.

Paul Burwell



WOLF TOOTH COMPONENTS EXPANDER COG

£70 / £74

SPECIFICATION Weight: 87g • Sizes: 40 and 42t • Colours: black, silver, red and blue • Contact: leveretproductions.com

This 42t dinner plate is bigger than most front chainrings, but if you want to change your standard cassette to a wide-range you're going to have to live with the look. It's offered in SRAM and Shimano configurations and in two sizes — 40 and 42t.

As with all of these expander cogs, you will need to remove one of the smaller sprockets. The usual procedure is to drop out the 17 and 15 tooth and insert a 16t to smooth out the jumps between ratios. Leveret Productions, the UK importer, offers a 16t cog for this purpose, priced at £12.

The SLX rear mech looked strained but has proved capable with no trouble shifting — I didn't even have to replace the B-tension adjustment screw on the rear mech with a longer one, something you may have to do with certain derailleur/cog combinations.

Advantages of the cog become obvious as soon as you head upwards. The 30x42 set-up produces a ridiculously small gear, meaning I was able to clear some climbs that usually involved a large amount of grunt pretty easily.

Like most similar products, the Wolf Tooth Components Expander Cog is something of a compromise, but it provides a cheaper alternative to 1x11, and I think it is a viable way to run a nine- or 10-speed drivetrain and enjoy all the gears you could ever need, or want.

Jim Clarkson

8



MADISON ALPINE GLOVES

£19.99

SPECIFICATION Sizes: S-XL • Colours: red, grey, black/white • Contact: madison.co.uk

The Alpine glove was developed with the help of the Saracen DH race team, so Manon Carpenter, Matt Simmonds and Sam Dale all had input into the design. The result is a single-layer palm, silicone print on the braking fingers, simple Velcro wrist closure and a lightweight Lycra upper. The feel is excellent, and it's so lightweight you hardly know you're wearing a glove at all. My only issue is with the Velcro tag being underneath the wrist. It's hidden away, and if you don't undo it, you'll rip the glove at the seams as you pull it on. I did two pairs in just a few days before I sussed this out.

Paul Burwell

9

KONA 167

The Process 167 is the ultimate in DH/freeride/hardcore enduro, with the pedaling performance to get you to the top. A bike that Kona Team rider Graham Agassiz spins and flips with ease will also excel in the burliest of enduro races should you want to race it. With proven geometry on the ultra plush, super stiff and reliable Process platform, rest assured the new 167 is going to be a trail screamer. If you wanted to call this bike the new Stinky, we'd be ok with that.



PROCESS 167



konaworld.com
[www.konaworld.com/process](http://konaworld.com/process)

LONG TERMERS

Countless hours on the trails make this the ultimate test of performance as well as reliability

INTRODUCING

JAMES'S VITUS ESCARPE VRX

£1,999.99 / 650b / chainreactioncycles.com



THE RIDER

JAMES SMURTHWAITE

Position Junior writer

Mostly rides

Surrey Hills

Height 5ft 11in

Weight 70kg

THE BIKE

■ 650b trail bike with slack geometry

■ Asymmetric travel: 150mm front, 135mm rear

■ Cutting-edge 1x11 SRAM drivetrain

■ Short stem and RockShox Reverb Stealth dropper post

MONTH 1: New boy James is literally floored by his debut test rig

You only get one chance to make a first impression. As I lay sprawled on my back in front of a bemused photographer after only one corner on my new longerterm, I couldn't help but feel I had made a bad one. A quick inspection of the bike revealed that I'd left my shock in climb mode too — this wasn't going well.

Let's hope I can make a better first impression on you. I'm James, the new junior writer and web guy here at **mbr**. The second new face to introduce is the latest edition to our long-term test fleet, the Vitus Escarpe VRX.

Sold exclusively through Chain Reaction Cycles, the Escarpe range is made up of eight bikes in total, three 29ers and five 650b options. The VRX is the fourth highest specced of the 650b bikes. If you go to vitusbikes.com, the bike is listed as having an RRP of £2,500, but seeing as you can only buy it through CRC, and it's currently discounted to the tune of 20 per cent, the

real price is just below the magic £2,000 mark. This recent price cut puts it in the same price bracket as the lower-specced VRS, which we tested in our 'Best Mountain Bikes under £2,000' test in the January issue. That bike scored an eight out of 10, which surely bodes well for this higher specced model.

Let's take a closer look at what the VRX has going for it. What stood out to me most was the bronzed Marzocchi fork taking care of things up front. We're all so caught up in the great RockShox v Fox rivalry it's sometimes easy to forget that other fork brands do exist.

In this case it's a Marzocchi 350 CR, with 150mm travel, 15mm axle and beefy 35mm upper tubes. The Espresso anti-friction coating looks great and hopefully it will be a lot smoother and more palatable than a cup of Gold Blend. Fitting the 15mm quick-release is anything but smooth; it left

Scuffed cranks could point to clearance issues

WHY IT'S HERE
Bespoke dual-susser from CRC's own brand

three of us stumped before we'd even started riding. Unfamiliar territory indeed. I'll keep you updated on how the Italian fork holds up throughout the year.

On more familiar ground, the VRX gets Shimano SLX brakes, a SRAM X1 drivetrain and, most impressively of all, a RockShox Reverb Stealth dropper post. You'd be hard pushed to beat that spec for this sort of



money and I'm not expecting to encounter any issues here.

The 150mm Marzocchi fork is paired with 135mm at the rear, giving quite a drastic asymmetry to the Escarpe's suspension, so hopefully it will feel balanced out on the trail. At 5ft 11in I went for a large frame (19in), a size up from what I'm used to, and although it felt a little unwieldy in the car park, the added stability translated immediately to increased speed on the trail – which is probably why I binned it in the very first corner!

The only potential negative I've found, so far, is that the ends of the crank arms are scuffed from a previous rider, perhaps hinting at a bottom bracket that is a little too low. It's not something I've yet experienced, but I will keep my ears pricked for any tell-tale crunches.

Following its quick Surrey Hills shakedown ride, I'm off to give it a proper pasting at the Forest of Dean and Triscombe with my brother. I'm hoping for steep, rooty, loamy loveliness, and to keep the Vitus rubber-side down.



IN THE SHED



Commencal Meta HT AM Race 650B £1,149.51



GT Sensor Carbon Expert £2,899.99



Kona Process 134 £2,399



Specialized Camber Evo 29 £2,000



Transition TransAm 29 £1,899



Trek Remedy 9 29 £3,500



Vitus Escarpe VRX £1,999.99



ROO'S COMMENCAL META HT AM RACE 650B

£1,144.51 / 650b / commencal-store.co.uk



THE RIDER

ROO FOWLER
Position Photographer
Mostly rides Surrey Hills
Height 6ft 4in
Weight 87kg

THE BIKE

■ 650b enduro hardtail that's actually available in XL!
 ■ Slack 65.3° head angle with 150mm RockShox Revelation fork
 ■ Great spec for the money
 ■ Order online and have it shipped to your door

MONTH 5: Upsizing the rear tyre boosts comfort and control as Roo begins to embrace the fat-bike mentality

First and foremost, I'm happy to report that the Formula CR3 brakes are still working perfectly! OK, I can still hear the slightest bit of rotor rub every now and then, but this seems to come and go depending on how hot the rotors are and what mood the calipers are in. Either way, it isn't enough to slow progress on the trail.

As for the other components, everything is proving more than up to the job. And I applaud Commencal for specing this aggressive trail hardtail with a 50mm stem — unheard of on XL sizes from other brands. If I were being really picky about the spec though, I'd like a 780mm bar instead of the 760mm fitted, as my 6ft 4in frame needs lots of room to manoeuvre.

Last month I talked about swapping the 2.25in Maxxis Ardent rear tyre for something fatter to provide extra comfort and improved traction. Unable to find a matching set of tyres, I simply shuffled the 2.4in Ardent to the back, and fitted a Schwalbe Hans Dampf up front.

This has certainly improved the ride; in all those moments when traction is limited, whether it's cornering or climbing, the loss of grip seems to be slower and more predictable. Comfort has increased as well, and I find the extra cushioning provided by the bigger rear tyre easily outweighs any increase in weight or rolling resistance.

Before swapping the tyres around, I thought frame

WHY IT'S HERE
Killer price, killer attitude and the sizing goes up to XL

Tyre clearance at the rear is surprisingly good



SPECIFICATION

Frame 6061 triple butted alloy
Fork RockShox Revelation RL Solo Air, 150mm travel
Wheels Sealed bearing hubs, double wall 28mm rims, Maxxis Ardent 2.4/ 2.25in tyres
Drivetrain Alpha 24/38 chainset, SRAM X9 r-mech, X5 f-mech, X7 2x10 shifters
Brakes Formula CR3, 180mm
Components Alpha 750mm bar, 60mm stem, KS eTEN 100mm dropper, Meta AM saddle
Sizes S, M, L, XL
Weight 12.84kg (28.3lb)

GEOMETRY

Size tested XL
Head angle 65.3°
Seat angle 72.7°
BB height 309mm
Chainstay 426mm
Front centre 752mm
Wheelbase 1,178mm
Down tube 715mm
Top tube 635mm
Reach 447mm

clearance could be an issue, but it's actually not as tight as I'd feared — so I'm now thinking about fitting 2.5in tyres front and rear to boost grip and comfort even further. Hang on, isn't that starting to approach 27.5+ territory? Maybe there's something in those fat-tire bikes after all...

TRAIL
RITCHIEY 

BAR

WCS TRAIL RIZER
PROVEN RITCHIEY PERFORMANCE
IN A 740MM LIGHT YET
DURABLE PACKAGE

STEM

WCS TRAIL STEM
REVISED C220 CLAMP INCREDIBLY
LIGHT (115g) STIFF & STRONG

POST

WCS TRAIL SEATPOST
EASY ADJUSTABILITY
TOUGH & LIGHT 235g

READY TO SHRED

RITCHIEY

Designed to Win.

RITCHIEY TRAIL COMPONENTS



paligap.cc



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Ritchey is exclusively distributed in the UK by www.paligap.cc

RITCHIEYLOGIC.COM





JIM'S TRANSITION TRANSAM 29

£1,899 / 29in / windwave.co.uk



THE RIDER

JIM CLARKSON
Position Graphic designer

Mostly rides
Sussex trails
Height 5ft 10in
Weight 76kg

THE BIKE

- 29er 'all-mountain' hardtail
- Durable steel frame with adjustable chainstay length
- RockShox Pike fork with 120mm travel
- Available as a frame-only for £499

MONTH 6: Is there anything the TransAM can't do? Apparently not...

As I sit down to type up this, my sixth longterm report on the TransAM 29, I'm just in from my lunchtime ride. The loop was techy, with super narrow twisty trails, requiring max effort up and down — it was a great way to blow the cobwebs out of my lungs and clear my head.

Sure, I had a couple of moments that got my heart pumping a little faster, but they weren't enough to interrupt the fast, fluid pace of the ride. In fact, it's in these more sketchy situations that the TransAM really shines. It simply loves rooty, demanding trails that require pinpoint accuracy. I've not found that the slack angles make the bike less nimble; it's just as happy turning on a dime as it is slicing through the woods. And it climbs well too, with the long wheelbase keeping the front wheel firmly planted.

I've had a few people ask if I've made use of the adjustable dropouts to run the TransAM 29 in singlespeed guise, but the answer is no, not yet. The main reason is that I don't have a 29er singlespeed wheelset, or spacer set, but I'm also not convinced that having one gear is going to make it any more fun. In fact, I've gone in the opposite direction by adding a 42t range expander cog. Going singlespeed would save some weight and add a new dimension to the bike, but I fear it would mostly be pain.

WHY IT'S HERE
A reliably tough hardtail for all-day riding



DAVE'S GT SENSOR CARBON EXPERT

£2,899.99 / 650b / gtbicycles.com

MONTH 7: A stubborn refusal to go wrong means more trail time



THE RIDER

DAVE ARTHUR
Position writer/tester
Mostly rides FOD/Wales
Height 5ft 11in
Weight 66kg

THE BIKE

- Modern long, low geometry with 130mm of rear travel and a 130mm fork
- Full carbon-fibre frame and swingarm with forged and CNC'd PathLink
- Well-specced with reliable Shimano parts and KS LEV Integra dropper post
- Top-end bike from five-strong range starting at £1,499

WHY IT'S HERE
Carbon trail bike with a unique suspension system at a great price

Modern mountain bikes are pretty reliable things, but durability was a concern when the GT Sensor first arrived. With its complex PathLink suspension design and convoluted cable routing, my initial thought was that there's no way this bike was going to last a few months without grinding to a halt. How wrong I was — it has proved to be utterly reliable, and it hasn't spent a minute in the bike shop.

Talking of reliability, the RockShox Revelation fork and Fox shock have not faltered, the wheels are still true and the hub bearings spin smoothly. The highlight of the package, the SLX stoppers, are the best brakes I've ever had on a bike. The only blemish is the lazy KS Lev dropper post that's slow to return. Otherwise, this superb reliability has meant I've been able to spend more time riding the bike and tweaking the set up, and less time worrying about maintenance. Reassuring when you're spending this sort of cash on a bike.

cannondale		2012	2013	2014	
FLASH ALLOY 29er 2	RRP £1800	NOW £1199.99	RRP £1800	NOW £1199.99	
FLASH CARBON 1	RRP £300	NOW £2579.99	RRP £300	NOW £2579.99	
2013					
TRAIL SL 1	RRP £1100	NOW £679.99	RRP £1100	NOW £679.99	
F29 1	RRP £2000	NOW £1229.99	F29 1	RRP £2000	NOW £1229.99
F29 2	RRP £1800	NOW £1099.99	F29 2	RRP £1800	NOW £1099.99
SCALPEL 29ER 1 CARBON	RRP £6000	NOW £3599.99	SCALPEL 29ER 1 CARBON	RRP £6000	NOW £3599.99
JEKYLL 3	RRP £3200	NOW £1599.99	JEKYLL 3	RRP £3200	NOW £1599.99
TRIGGER 29ER 1	RRP £3600	NOW £1799.99	TRIGGER 29ER 1	RRP £3600	NOW £1799.99
TRIGGER 29ER 2	RRP £3000	NOW £1499.99	TRIGGER 29ER 2	RRP £3000	NOW £1499.99
TRIGGER 29ER 3	RRP £2600	NOW £1249.99	TRIGGER 29ER 3	RRP £2600	NOW £1249.99
F29 CARBON 3	RRP £2500	NOW £1499.99	F29 CARBON 3	RRP £2500	NOW £1499.99
R2 29ER XL22	RRP £2500	NOW £1389.99	R2 29ER XL22	RRP £2500	NOW £1389.99
SCALPEL 29ER 4	RRP £2000	NOW £1199.99	SCALPEL 29ER 4	RRP £2000	NOW £1199.99
JEKYLL CARBON 2	RRP £1500	NOW £829.99	JEKYLL CARBON 2	RRP £1500	NOW £829.99
TRIGGER CARBON 1	RRP £5500	NOW £2499.99	TRIGGER CARBON 1	RRP £5500	NOW £2499.99
TRIGGER CARBON 2	RRP £3800	NOW £1749.99	TRIGGER CARBON 2	RRP £3800	NOW £1749.99
2014					
F29 B BLACK INC	RRP £7800	NOW £679.99	F29 B BLACK INC	RRP £7800	NOW £679.99
F29 CARBON 2	RRP £3500	NOW £1999.99	F29 CARBON 2	RRP £3500	NOW £1999.99
F29 CARBON 3	RRP £2900	NOW £1749.99	F29 CARBON 3	RRP £2900	NOW £1749.99
F29 ALLOY 4	RRP £2400	NOW £1459.99	F29 ALLOY 4	RRP £2400	NOW £1459.99
F29 ALLOY 5	RRP £2000	NOW £1599.99	F29 ALLOY 5	RRP £2000	NOW £1599.99
TRIGGER 29 4	RRP £1250	NOW £599.99	TRIGGER 29 4	RRP £1250	NOW £599.99
TRAIL SL 29 1	RRP £1100	NOW £625.99	TRAIL SL 29 1	RRP £1100	NOW £625.99
TRAIL SL 29 2	RRP £800	NOW £495.99	TRAIL SL 29 2	RRP £800	NOW £495.99
TRAIL SL 29 3	RRP £800	NOW £359.99	TRAIL SL 29 3	RRP £800	NOW £359.99
TANGO 29 5	RRP £500	NOW £309.99	TANGO 29 5	RRP £500	NOW £309.99
TANGO 29 6	RRP £500	NOW £309.99	TANGO 29 6	RRP £500	NOW £309.99

GT 2013		SCOTT 2013	
Karakorum 2.0	RRP £700	RRP £1700	RRP £1249.99
Karakorum 1.0	RRP £900	RRP £2500	RRP £2199.99
SCOTT			
SCALE 60			
SCALE 620			
SCOTT 600C			

The image displays three Cannondale mountain bikes side-by-side. From left to right: the 2013 TRIGER CRB 1, the 2014 TRAIL SL29 3, and the 2014 XTC ADVANCED 27.5 2. Each bike is shown from a front-three-quarter perspective. The TRIGER CRB 1 is black with a white frame and yellow accents. The TRAIL SL29 3 is red with a black frame and white accents. The XTC ADVANCED 27.5 2 is blue with a black frame and white accents. Each bike has its model name and year printed vertically on its frame. Price tags are overlaid on the top right of each bike: £2499.99 for the TRIGER, £2499.99 for the TRAIL, and £1799.99 for the XTC.

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JAMIE'S TREK REMEDY 9 29

£3,500 / 29in / trekbikes.com



THE RIDER

JAMIE DARLOW

Position Buzz editor
Mostly rides Surrey Hills
Height 6ft 1in
Weight 75kg

THE BIKE

■ 29er trail bike with 140mm travel and enduro-bike stiffness
 ■ Newfangled RE:aktiv damper from Fox and Penske Racing
 ■ Mino link adjustable geometry to fettle head angle and BB height
 ■ Internal cabling, 1x11 drivetrain, Reverb Stealth dropper post

MONTH 5: Bike test editor Al's impressed with the acceleration of JD's Remedy but less impressed with his sizing choice

With JD up to his elbows in nappies, baby wipes and formula milk, I figured this was probably a good time to steal a ride on his Remedy longtermer.

At 5ft 11in, I'm a couple of inches shorter than JD, but given that I rode a 21in Remedy 29 at the launch in Arizona I knew that it would fit perfectly once I swapped to a 35mm stem.

The real reason for this brief encounter, however, was that I wanted to see what the new RE:aktiv damper brings to the table.

Designed in conjunction with Penske Racing, the RE:aktiv damper takes F1 suspension technology to the trail. The idea is that the regressive valving inside the shock provides good resistance against low-speed forces like pedal-induced bob or weight shifts when cornering, while still retaining great small bump sensitivity.

Sounds too good to be true? Well, it is. Don't take that as a criticism though; the Remedy 29 has easily the best rear suspension of any 140mm bike I've ridden. Super-sensitive in Descend mode, the rear end has just the right amount of progression to prevent bottoming. It's got lots of spring too, and this makes the bike very agile and playful on more flowing trails.

WHY IT'S HERE
 To see if Trek, Fox and Penske have made the ultimate suspension

Get on the gas, however, and the shock and upper suspension link behave like a nodding donkey.

As such, I found myself reaching for the CTD lever on the shock more than normal; using Trail mode for technical climbs and reserving the very firm Climb setting for fire roads and tarmac.

What's really interesting about the suspension on the Remedy, though, is that the extra shock movement when you stand up to sprint doesn't seem to affect power output. This bike is lightning fast to accelerate, and it's probably because the aluminium frame is so darn stiff.

My one criticism of the Remedy 29 is that the steering is too light, and I found myself fighting to keep it on line when the descents turned steep or wild. Given that the chainstay length on the Remedy is approaching 450mm, I'm sure that the twitchy steering isn't due to a lack of weight on the front end. It's more likely that the longer offset option on the Pike fork is making the steering behave like a bike with a much steeper head angle. But before I go and fit an offset shock bushing or an angle-adjust headset to JD's longtermer, I'm going to see if I can get him a 23in Remedy to ride back-to-back with the 21in, as I'm convinced that this bike is too small for him.

Alan Muldoon

SPECIFICATION

Frame Alpha Platinum Aluminium, 140mm travel
Shock Fox Performance Series Float, DRCV, RE:aktiv, CTD
Fork RockShox Pike RC, Solo Air, 140mm travel
Wheels SRAM Roam 30 tubeless, Bontrager XR4 Expert/XR3 29x2.3in tyres
Drivetrain SRAM X1
Brakes Shimano XT
Components Bontrager saddle, bar, stem and grips, RockShox Reverb Stealth seatpost,
Sizes 15.5, 17.5, 19, 21, 23in
Weight 13.74kg (30.3lb)

GEOMETRY

(LOW SETTING)
Size tested 21in
Head angle 67.4°
Seat angle 68.7°
BB height 348mm
Chainstay 449mm
Front centre 750mm
Wheelbase 1,199mm
Down tube 712mm
Top tube 618mm
Reach 451mm

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“Daddy,
can I ride trails just like you?”



INTRODUCING THE TRAIL RUNNER XL

Age
3-4.5 years

Inside Leg
42cm+

Approx Height
100cm

If this is wrong, we don't want to be right. The freedom to go through anything or over everything is a pretty good start to an adventurous life. Our lightest frameset keeps weight to a minimum and offsets the larger tyres making grip and ride comfort the big winners. If the fonz had a balance bike, this would have been it.



THE BELTER 16”

Age
3-6 years

Inside Leg
45cm+

Approx Height
105cm

Thanks to bespoke components throughout, this bike is all about removing barriers. Lightweight, with low rolling resistance thanks to cartridge bearings (hubs, pedals, bottom brackets) and semi slick tyres, this bike allows the youngest of riders to enjoy a pedal bike in the same way they've enjoyed their balance bike. A bike that makes the transition to pedalling as seamless as our belts.



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THE
FINAL
VERDICT

DANNY'S SPECIALIZED CAMBER EVO 29

£2,000 / 29in / specialized.com



THE RIDER

DANNY MILNER

Position Deputy editor

Mostly rides Surrey Hills

Height 5ft 10in

Weight 72kg

THE BIKE

■ 120mm-travel 29er with aggressive spec and geometry

■ Evo model is slacker, lower, longer-travel and gets wider bars and fatter tyres

■ £200 cheaper for 2015

MONTH 10: After 10 months of tearing up the trails, Danny's Camber Evo gets its final appraisal

What attracted you to the Specialized Camber Evo?

What didn't attract me to the Camber Evo? It's a bike that missed our illustrious Trail Bike of the Year award in 2014 by a whisker, but bounced back for 2015 with a better spec, a flashy new paint job and a generous discount. After spending most of last year aboard Kona's Process 111, I also wanted to see how it stacked up against its nearest rival.

Did you change anything straightaway?

After teetering around on tip-toes for the first ride, I hacked a good portion off the 400mm seatpost and swapped the standard 70mm stem for a 30mm stubby. Specialized fits size-specific grips on its bikes, and I downsized to the slimmer versions of the stock Sip Grip. Specialized's Command dropper post was added and the front derailleur, front shifter, chainring and Dangler chain tensioner was subtracted. This saved 350g and simplified the drivetrain.

The rims on the Camber Evo are tubeless-ready as standard, and it comes with tubeless valves, so making the switch was easy. Finally, a couple of volume spacers added to the RockShox Reba fork allowed me to run slightly lower pressures — for improved grip — without bottoming out excessively.

Was the bike easy to set up?

Specialized's Autosag system made getting started a doddle. I ran the compression damping in the open setting 99.9 per cent of the time — the other 0.1 per cent I had knocked the blue lever by accident when removing my water bottle.

How did it ride?

If you have any preconceptions of short-travel 29ers being nervous, uninspiring and purely aimed at the Lycra set, I implore you to have a ride on the Camber Evo. It got me into, and more importantly out of, situations

Gear shift: various
componentry was
jettisoned

WHY IT'S HERE
Bike of the Year
contender that's
better value
than ever
before



that should be well above its pay grade. With a dinky stem, a low bottom bracket and meaty Butcher front tyre, it corners brilliantly and changes direction with total immediacy. And while it's short on travel, there's no shortage of grip from the rear suspension. In fact it's one of the most active systems on the market. Yes, it's pretty easy to bottom out, but it still puts the power down without too much bobbing and the long chainstays give great traction on steep climbs.

Did anything break or wear out?

On a particularly cold day at BikePark



Wales, air leaked from the spring leg into the lowers, rendering the RockShox Reba fork all but unrideable until it blew the left dust seal out.

Elsewhere, the headset and bottom bracket bearings are now due replacement. But, with 455 miles on the clock, everything else is still going strong.

If you could change one thing about your longtermer what would it be?

I'd like to see Specialized fit shorter stems as standard; something like a 40mm would really suit this bike and unlock its potential from the get-go.

Would you buy this bike and why?

Short-travel 29ers are hugely underrated. Done well, they are some of the most stimulating and rewarding bikes on the market. Riding the Kona Process 111 last year confirmed that to me and, in terms of suspension performance and rider engagement, Specialized's Camber Evo raises that bar even further. Would I buy one? You bet I would.

10



The Evo effortlessly adapted to any terrain



Leaky air spring blew out dust seal

HIGHS

- The perfect blend of handling prowess and mile-munching efficiency.
- Improved spec and better looks for less money than last year.
- Still some of the best rear suspension in the business.

LOWS

- Fork can become overwhelmed when you start to push.
- Stock stem is too long
- Badly needs full internal dropper post routing.

SPECIFICATION

Frame M5 alloy, 120mm travel

Shock Fox Float CTD Evolution

Fork RockShox Reba RC, 120mm travel

Wheels Specialized Hi Lo hubs, Roval Fattie rims, Specialized Butcher Control/Ground Control 29x2.3in tyres

Drivetrain SRAM S1250 chainset, SRAM X9 r-mech and X7 shifters

Brakes Shimano Deore, 203/180mm

Components Specialized

Weight 13.18kg

Sizes S, M, L, XL

GEOMETRY

Size ridden L

Head angle 68.6°

Seat angle 69.2°

BB height 330mm

Chainstay 455mm

Front centre 712mm

Wheelbase 1,167mm

Down tube 706mm

Top tube 619mm

Reach 434mm



Frame desperately needs stealth dropper post routing



THE
FINAL
VERDICT

JASON'S KONA PROCESS 134

£2,399 / 650b / konaworld.com



THE RIDER

JASON HARDY

Position Picture editor
Mostly rides Surrey Hills
Height 6ft 2in
Weight 101kg

THE BIKE

■ Mid-travel bike in the Kona Process range
■ Long front end, chunky rear
■ 134mm of travel with 140mm fork
■ 40mm stems on all four sizes

MONTH 10: Jason loves everything about his Kona – except the fork and the price

What attracted you to the Kona?

I wanted something a bit burlier with 650b wheels that would give a bolder riding experience. Also, **mbr** has only had good things to say about the Process, so I felt confident it would be a good long-term companion. In fact, we've had 10 glorious months together.

Did you change anything straightaway?

The Kona-branded 760mm bar and 40mm stem were a great fit straight out of the box, so I never felt the need to make the standard **mbr** swap. Getting the Process in midwinter, however, meant that I quickly exchanged the fast-rolling Maxxis Ardent tyres for some Maxxis Shortys; the chunky knobs instantly restored confidence, even on the wettest, muddiest trails. Further down the line, the annoyingly short-travel 100mm dropper post was swapped out for a 150mm drop KS Lev Integra.

Was the bike easy to set up?

Yes, just the usual fork and shock set-up,

although the rebound adjuster on the Sektor fork was pretty feeble; the flexy tab at the base of the fork felt like it could snap at any moment.

How did it ride?

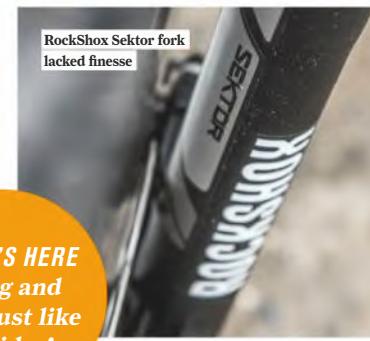
Awesome! The lack of flex in the stout rear end meant the bike tracked well, giving no unnerving creaks or groans. I've been hitting bigger jumps and drops on it than any other bike. Despite it being almost 15kg (just over 33lb) I didn't feel too penalised. The solid and reassuring build of the frame and rear suspension contribute to the great ride, so for me the extra pounds on the bike weren't a huge issue.

Did anything break or wear out?

Despite my new hooning confidence, the bike (and my collarbone) stayed intact. The Sektor fork developed a light knocking noise, which was remedied under warranty (a failed O-ring), but apart from that it has

RockShox Sektor fork
lacked finesse

WHY IT'S HERE
It's big and
burly, just like
the rider!



hung together well. Considering the Formula braking woes on my previous longterm (Roo, I feel your pain), I have to give massive praise to the Shimano Deore stoppers – for reliability and stopping power they're incredible.

If you could change one thing about your longterm what would it be?

The Rockshox Sektor fork was the fly (and a big one at that) in the ointment. For a £2,400 bike this level of fork really shouldn't be fitted as standard. It just didn't have the small-bump sensitivity or controlled progression on the bigger hits



HIGHS

- Smashing the Cresta Run trail on holiday in Bubión, Spain. Never been so thrilled and relieved to get to the bottom of a trail.
- The Shimano Deore brakes. Not the strongest outright stoppers, but you can't put a price on the reliability.
- The riding performance of the bomber-solid frame and rear suspension.

LOWS

- The underwhelming RockShox Sektor fork was a constant source of irritation. Heavy steel stanchions?!
- A bit like the rider, there's no denying the Process is on the portly side.
- The stingy overall spec for the money.

SPECIFICATION

Frame 6061 aluminum, 134mm travel

Shock RockShox Monarch R

Fork RockShox Sektor Silver TK Solo Air, 140mm travel

Wheels Shimano Deore hubs, WTB ST i23 TCS rims, Maxxis Ardent EXO TR 2.25in tyres

Drivetrain Shimano Deore 24/38t chainset, XT Shadow Plus r-mech, SRAM X5 f-mech, Shimano Deore shifters

Brakes Shimano Deore, 180/160mm

Components

Kona 760mm bar and 40mm stem, KS Eten R dropper, WTB Volt saddle

Sizes S, M, L, XL

Weight 14.98kg (33.02lb)

GEOMETRY

Size tested XL

Head angle 67.9°

Seat angle 68.7°

BB height 342mm

Chainstay 425mm

Front centre 778mm

Wheelbase 1,203mm

Down tube 732mm

Top tube 660mm

Reach 485mm



Beefy rear triangle makes for a direct, lively ride



to suit the character of the bike. I borrowed a RockShox Pike when I took the Process to Bubión, Spain, which really allowed the bike to shine in the tough conditions (if you've ridden the Cresta Run trail after it was washed through by a storm, you'll know what I mean). Suddenly the Process became the all-conquering beast I knew it could be.

Would you buy this bike?

Despite having such a fundamental weak point in the fork, I always loved swinging a leg over the Kona. It's just a super-manoeuvrable bike that never feels sketchy. The rear suspension is amazing and the bombproof frame has loads of standover clearance, which means it's really easy to move around the bike uninhibited. Would I buy it, though? Probably not. Even if I can't fault the ride quality, compared to a slew of great bikes available on the market right now it's just not very good value for money. Even ignoring internet-only brands, the price tag and spec on the Process 134 simply don't add up.



Baggy shorts

A garment that helps define us as mountain bikers, baggy shorts are comfortable, protective and – most important of all – stylish

Words: Paul Burwell Photos: Roo Fowler, Claire Collins

Baggy shorts are part of the mountain biker's uniform. It's what separates us from roadies, runners, rugby players and footballers. There are some performance aspects to wearing them off road – they're less restrictive, more practical, hard-wearing – but mostly it's about style; baggy shorts just draw fewer looks than tight Lycra. That said, they still have to be comfortable, practical and affordable.

The only way to guarantee complete comfort is to wear an inner short/liner. This is slightly different to the standard Lycra you see the Tour de France riders wearing – it's often shorter in the leg, and since it's beneath another layer, it is made from a more breathable mesh fabric or thinner Lycra.

The liner should fit snugly, but you may have to mix and match inner and outer sizes to achieve the optimum fit.

The outer short is usually made from a nylon fabric. Choose a lighter weight for the summer, and a thicker, or mesh-lined, short for the colder months. Waist adjusters allow you to fine-tune the fit without resorting to a belt, and pockets are useful, although by no means essential.

Price-wise, a good baggy short can cost anything from £50 to over £100, depending whether it has a liner included or not. Top-end shorts are (hopefully) better made, use more sophisticated fabrics and often have a more complex inner short to improve fit, but they don't necessarily have any additional features.

USED AND ABUSED

How we test

For something that you use day-in, day-out, baggy shorts need to be comfortable, and that means no thick or prominent seams in the crotch area, a breathable construction and comfy liner. The only way to put these to the test is by riding them in hot and dusty conditions and for long, sustained bursts. We also tested all these baggy shorts with and without kneepads, to see if they snagged at the hem because, despite what manufacturers say, it's hard to tell if the shorts ride up until you get on the trails and start pedalling.

JARGON BUSTER

Know your baggy shorts

ADJUSTABLE WAIST

Velcro tags on the waist allow you to tweak the fit of the short. You see them inside and outside; the former are neater, but the Velcro can scuff your skin. On the outside, they can catch on jerseys and passing foliage. Some shorts have big buckle straps which can cause issues in a crash.

HIP POCKETS

Not essential, but nice to have — these are perfect for car keys, small change or a phone. If they're deep, you shouldn't need zips.

LINER

You will pay extra to have a liner short included. It has to be comfortable and highly wicking. Look for a shaped pad, wicking material and make sure it's snug against your skin to reduce chafing. Avoid liners with a flat pad and little shape. Our advice is to try before you buy. Factor in about £25 for an aftermarket liner if your short doesn't come with one. There is nothing stopping you mixing and matching brands.



FLY

To stop the waist popping open accidentally, it should have a press-stud fixing. Extra studs and/or a small strip of Velcro provide additional security. Belt loops are a good idea if there are no waist adjusters.



LENGTH

The longer the leg, the more protection it provides against brambles and scrapes. Also, a longer leg is less liable to ride up when using kneepads. Look for at least a 13in inseam.

RIPSTOP MATERIAL

To stop baggy shorts tearing, some of them use a Ripstop fabric. This is made from nylon, reinforced with thin threads in a sort of grid pattern.

DWR COATING

This is a water repellent treatment that is applied to the fabric when new. It does what it says on the tin, but it needs renewing fairly often, as it can lose its effectiveness after repeated washing and wear against the saddle.



ALTURA ATTACK 180

£69.99

SPECIFICATION Sizes: S-XXL • Liner: yes • Colours: black
Contact: altura.co.uk

The Altura Attack 180 is £10 more than the Summit baggy we tested last year, but we think it's a slightly better trail short. It uses a softer, four-way stretch fabric, so fits better and is also notably more breathable, with extra mesh panels on the front thigh area and side providing additional ventilation.

Adjusting the size comes via external Velcro waist tabs, and there are two poppers on the zipped fly. We had issues with the poppers coming away on the Summit, but no such problems with the Attack 180. Front zipped pockets are handy for keys and a phone, and the opening is big enough that you won't struggle getting a hand in. Altura also hasn't cut the Attack 180 too short; with a 14in inseam, there's a generous amount of kneepad overlap.

The Summit's inner short was poor, but this Attack 180 liner is a figure-hugging four-panel design, with a breathable microfibre insert. The sizing is much better too; we didn't need to run a medium liner in the large short.



9



CLUB RIDE FUZE

£64.99

SPECIFICATION Sizes: S-XXL • Liner: yes • Colours: blue and black
Contact: hotlines-uk.com

With a 12in inseam, the Club Ride Fuze is the shortest baggy on test. It's well-made, and has some nice detailing. Even the lightweight, quick-drying, fabric feels comfortable against your skin, but the lack of length makes it feel like you're wearing something designed for swimming, not biking.

The good news is, the Fuze comes with a top-quality Gunslinger liner. This features a four-panel construction (the more panels, the better the fit), lightweight breathable mesh material, and a thick pad insert. Combined with the seamless crotch gusset in the baggy, overall comfort is impressive, but we spent most of our rides tugging at the legs and loosening the waist adjusters to get the short to run lower.

A quality constructed baggy, with a great liner, let down by a lack of leg length and a single press-stud fly, which popped open constantly when riding.



Waist straps needed constant adjustment



ENDURA SINGLETRACK LITE

£54.99

SPECIFICATION Sizes: S-XXL • Liner: no • Colours: red, blue, grey black
Contact: endurasport.com

Endura is only offering this red colour for a limited period, so get it while you can. As the name suggests, the Singletrack Lite is a stripped-back version of the company's award winning Singletrack short — lighter weight and with fewer features. It's made from four-way stretch nylons, but this is slightly stiffer feeling compared to other shorts like the Altura Attack 180. It is, however, slightly more water-resistant and, with a thicker seat panel, easily resists summer wheel-splatter.

The Singletrack Lite has a zipped front fly with a traditional button fastener. There are belt loops and waist adjusters — the latter have easy-grab Velcro tags and a good range of adjustment. Zipped thigh vents increase ventilation and the side pockets are zipped too, but we'd rather they were just a bit deeper.

The Singletrack Lite lacks a liner, but it's good value and has sensible features. Our only issue is that the slim fit may not suit everyone; it's a tight squeeze with some brands of kneepad.



Compatible with Clickfast liners

8

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* Hotel Ridge, Morzine. 7 nights, depart 30th of August.

** Surf Hotel, Vassiliki. 7 nights, depart 27th of September.

Prices correct at time of publication. E&OE. refer to website for full Ts&Cs



INTREPID CAMPAIGN

£85

SPECIFICATION Sizes: S-XL • Liner: no • Colours: black
Contact: intrepidapparel.co.uk

With a 15.5in inseam, the Campaign is the longest short here. It easily covers a set of kneepads, and with the cuffed legs and articulation, doesn't flap around or ride up when you're ripping. Intrepid claims the short is made from a three-way stretch fabric — though we've counted twice and are convinced it's four-way — but either way the short is super-comfortable to ride in. It's a thick short, and weighty too, and while there are a couple of thigh vents to improve circulation, we did find it a bit too warm in hot weather.

The Campaign features an oversize fly zip with a double popper. The beefy waist adjusters have a good range of adjustment, but we wouldn't want to land on those massive buckles in a crash. The fleece-lined hand pockets are a nice touch, although the large cargo pockets are a bit unnecessary.

For a baggy without a liner, the Campaign is expensive, but the build quality is excellent. Too hot for the summer, but for the rest of the year it'd be perfect.



9

IXS SEVER

£85

SPECIFICATION Sizes: S-XXL • Liner: no • Colours: black and grey
Contact: hotlines-uk.com

With its soft touch, four-way stretch material, the IXS Sever feels a lot like the Altura Attack 180 — it even has a similar 15in leg length and generous cut. The fabric has a climate control feature, which is a sort of ribbing on the inside to improve breathability and wicking. It's also soft against the skin and surprisingly resistant to scuffs and dirt.

The IXS has heavy-duty poppers on the fly, with additional safety Velcro on the closing tab. Chunky waist adjusters get plenty of wrap-over, and the hand pockets are zipped for security. We're not fans of the lower cargo pockets, but at least they don't add bulk to the short. The Sever features crotch vents, for improved airflow when the heat rises. IXS doesn't include a liner with this short, but it does offer one, which you can purchase for about £30.

As a standalone baggy, the Sever is expensive, but it does have a top quality construction and finish. It loses a mark simply because you can buy a similar quality short for about the same money, and get a liner included.



8

MADISON ALPINE FR

£54.99

SPECIFICATION Sizes: S- XXL • Liner: no • Colours: Black and red •
Contact: madison.co.uk

We tested the excellent Flux short a year ago, but Madison has since added the new Alpine FR short to its range. It has some specific DH/Freeride features, but it's still light enough for trail riding. The DH spec includes a zipped fly with a ratchet-style strap, reinforced 600D fabric rear seat panel, and wider leg openings than most to allow for the extra bulk of kneepads. Unfortunately, the Alpine FR is a little brief in the leg for a big-mountain short, and the ratchet fastener on our large sample didn't offer enough adjustment, causing the shorts to hang low at the crotch and snag on the saddle.

The body of the short is made up from a lightweight, four-way stretch fabric with big mesh panels and only minimal pockets and features. There are a couple of useful hip pockets for keys or a phone.

We like the loose fit and hard-wearing construction, Madison just needs to add some extra waist adjustment to allow users to fine-tune the sizing, and maybe an inch to the length.



7



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ONE INDUSTRIES VAPOUR

£95

SPECIFICATION Sizes: 34/36/38in • Liner: no • Colours: red, grey black • Contact: oneindustries.com

The Vapour short is made from the same material as One Industries' DH pant. It's a lightweight and hard-wearing polyester fabric, but the short didn't wick as well as some of the others on test and felt clammy next to the skin on long, hot rides. There are a couple of zipped crotch vents to increase airflow on the bike, but they didn't make a lot of difference.

For a gravity/enduro short, the Vapour is hardly generous in the leg, with only a 12.5in inseam. When we donned kneepads, the short tended to ride up and sit awkwardly over the top.

We liked the easy-to-use waist adjusters and twin press-studs on the waist — if one was to break you won't end up with the short around your ankles. The side pockets are zipped for security but we struggled to get our hands inside, especially with gloves on.

The construction is a little patchy — one of the seams on our sample has already started to come away — and for a short with no liner the Vapour is pricy.



6



RACE FACE TRIGGER

£69.95

SPECIFICATION Sizes: S-XXL • Liner: no • Colours: lime, blue, green • Contact: silverfish-uk.com

Like the best shorts, the Trigger is made from a four-way stretch polyester, with a bit of Spandex mixed in to help the fit, and a fine ribbing on the inside to help pull moisture away from your skin. It's also treated with a special DWR to repel water and stop staining. On the back is a heavy-duty corded nylon panel, to protect against tyre spray, and two pockets finished with zips and magnetic closures. The two hip pockets are also zipped, but they're a bit of a tight squeeze. A zippered front fly has twin press-studs and an extra strip of Velcro to stop it popping open accidentally. The waistband features low-profile adjusters, and these are silicone backed to stop the short slipping down when hunkering forward over the bars.

There is no liner, but you do get double reinforced seams and excellent quality for your money. Our main gripe is that it's so lightweight it has a tendency to flap around when riding at speed — another inch or so in the legs would help enormously.



7



ROYAL RACING STAGE

£69.99

SPECIFICATION Sizes: XS-XXL • Liner: no • Colours: grey and black • Contact: decade-europe.com

We ordered a medium size Stage, because Royal is notorious for coming up big, but this short is a little bit tight across the hips. It's not a big deal, but it does mean you should check the sizing before you buy. The good news is that the medium is long enough in the leg to overlap kneepads, without having to ride with the short hanging off your hips.

The Stage has the longest waist adjusters of any short on test, which is great news if you have long legs but a narrow waist. It's also available in the widest range of sizes, including an absolutely enormous XXL. Double-studded poppers provide belt and braces security, with an extra hook and loop fastener as a final failsafe.

To safely stash keys or a phone, the Stage has deep hip pockets and zipped side pockets — the latter are mesh-lined and provide additional venting if left open.

This is a great baggy, but with no liner it's just a little high-end; enough to stop it getting full marks.



9

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SCOTT TRAIL 10

£104.99

SPECIFICATION Sizes: S-XXL • Liner: yes • Colours: black, green, grey, blue • Contact: scott-sports.com

It's difficult to see from the photo, but Scott's Trail 10 is super-short in the leg, with only a 12in inseam. This is OK if you have stumpy legs, but with regular proportions you may feel a little exposed.

The Trail 10 is made from lightweight polyamide nylon, with a bit of stretch to improve the fit. It features two front vents, with hidden zips, two zipped side pockets and a single one at the rear. The waist adjusters are the best ever made. They're built into the waistband and work in the same way as a zip; pull the tag forward and they get tighter. Genius, Scott, genius!

The Trail 10 also has the best liner on test. It's snug, comfy, and with some extra perforations in the pad this year, wicks moisture from an area where you need it the most. The liner costs around £50 individually, which does explain the sky-high price of the Trail 10, although we would have upgraded the score if the short had about another four inches in the leg.

6

SUGOI EVO-X

£79.99

SPECIFICATION Sizes: S-XXL • Liner: yes • Colours: black • Contact: sugoi.com

The Evo-X is a lightweight trail short with an integrated liner. The construction features a four-way stretch, but oddly our large sample felt a little tight across the front. The double-snap front closure also kept popping open when riding — so upsizing could be in order.

Twin hip pockets have V-shaped openings, so are super-easy to get in to and they're deep, too. Two Velcro adjusters feature on the waistband, and they're inset, so you don't feel the prickly Velcro against your skin, even if you've got a little bit of 'overhang'. There's good length in the legs, although the lightweight fabric tends to billow slightly when riding.

The RC Pro liner is one of the best here. It has a lightweight, perforated mesh construction, and the four-panel cut means it fits snug against the body. There's a welded centre channel for pressure relief, but the silicone leg grippers are a little thick and caused a bit of chafing.

The Evo-X is a quality baggy, but you just might have to take a gamble on the sizing and fold over those leg grippers.

8



TROY LEE SKYLINE RACE

£79.99

SPECIFICATION Sizes: S-XXL • Liner: yes • Colours: red, black, grey, lime • Contact: fisheroutdoor.co.uk

We tested the Skyline Race a year ago, and apart from some new colours, it remains relatively unchanged for 2015. It's still built from two-way stretch polyester, so feels nice and loose when crouching low or moving around on the bike. There is plenty of length in the leg to cover kneepads, but it does billow slightly when riding fast. The fly features a two-snap closure with a strip of lightweight Velcro for added security. Deep hip pockets easily swallow house keys or a phone, and there's an additional rear zip pocket for anything smaller.

Troy Lee has made a few minor changes to the liner short this year. It still gets the breathable mesh construction and super comfy leg grippers, but the pad itself is less breathable and felt a bit clammy with temperatures in the high 20s. It's well padded, but it's a notch below the Sugoi and Scott. That said, this is still the outstanding baggy on test — great performance at a great price.

TEST WINNER!
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There's a reason this logo is a common sight

10

Verdict

You could argue that the length of your baggy shorts is just a style thing — a bit like long socks and three-quarter length sleeves. This may be so, but we reckon vertically-challenged baggy shorts don't feel as comfortable when you're riding, or provide as much protection against either trailside shrubbery or the elements. Also, having the short ride up over the top of kneepads can be both irritating and restrictive.

The Scott Trail 10 and Club Ride Fuze have some great features, but they look and feel way too small when you put them on. And the Scott Trail 10 has the additional problem of being ultra-expensive.

There are several mid-table baggy shorts, and they occupy that position due to being slightly expensive, lacking key performance features, or a combination of both. All are worth a punt, but there are better baggy shorts at the top table.

It was a close run thing for the win, with several baggies vying for best on test. We decided the best short should come with a liner, because it's a must-have for the first time buyer — you can't or shouldn't ride any short without one. The short itself also has to be lightweight and breathable, with sensible features, as well as being well made and durable.

The Troy Lee Skyline Race is a clean looking short, and the performance is top-notch. It's good value, isn't overloaded with excess features and, having spent the last couple of years riding several pairs, we also know it can go the distance. It's the best all-rounder, but if you want a short for colder months, try the Intrepid Campaign.

If you need the best liner possible, get the Sugoi Evo-X, and if you're on a budget, then take a look at the great value Altura Attack 180.



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	Price	Sizes	Liner?	Colours	Contact	Rating
Altura Attack 180	£69.99	S-XXL	Yes	Black	altura.co.uk	9
Club Ride Fuze	£64.99	S-XXL	Yes	Blue, black	hotlines-uk.com	8
Endura Singletrack Lite	£54.99	S-XXL	No	Red, blue, grey, black	endurasport.com	8
Intrepid Campaign	£85	S-XL	No	Black	intrepidapparel.co.uk	9
IXS Sever	£85	S-XXL	No	Black, grey	hotlines-uk.com	8
Madison Alpine FR	£54.99	S-XXL	No	Black, red	madison.co.uk	7
One Industries Vapour	£95	34,36,38in	No	Red, grey, black	oneindustries.com	8
Race Face Trigger	£69.95	S-XXL	No	Lime, blue, green	silverfish-uk.com	7
Royal Racing Stage	£69.99	XS-XXL	No	Grey, black	decade-europe.com	9
Scott Trail 10	£104.99	S-XXL	Yes	Black, green, grey, blue	scott-sports.com	6
Sugoi Evo-X	£79.99	S-XXL	Yes	Black	sugoi.com	8
Troy Lee Skyline Race	£79.99	S-XXL	Yes	Red, black, grey, lime	fisheroutdoor.co.uk	10

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DO-IT-ALL TRAIL BIKES

These all-rounders need to handle every type of terrain, with a special emphasis on slaying the downhill sections — we assess the versatility of three top contenders

Words: Alan Muldoon Photos: Roo Fowler



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ROSE GRANITE CHIEF 2 27.5

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TREK REMEDY 7 27.5

£2,000



CONTROL TYRES

To make the testing as fair as possible, we fitted Maxxis High Roller II 27.5x2.3in tyres to all bikes. Prices start at £29.99. extrauk.co.uk



The term 'trail bike' is as generic as mountain biking itself. It is synonymous with singletrack shredding, but with as many styles of bike as there are varieties of terrain; it's easy to see how you could drown in a sea of choice. And that's without even considering all of the different wheel sizes on offer.

One category that has always hit the trail bike sweet-spot, at least in terms of suspension, are 140-150mm travel bikes. Yes, there are bikes that will always defy boundaries, but with 160mm travel well established as enduro territory, and 120mm the benchmark for short-travel trail/marathon bikes, it's easy to see why 140-150mm travel bikes have evolved to cover the middle ground. Three such bikes are the Rose Granite Chief 2, Specialized Stumpjumper FSR Comp and Trek Remedy 7.

All three bikes sport 27.5in wheels, and while the 26in wheel will never die, most bike manufacturers have turned their backs on the wheel size that served us well for so long. Even 29er advocates, like Specialized and Trek, can't ignore the rapid pace with which 27.5in (650b) wheels have gained traction. From having only a couple of makeshift 27.5in Stumpjumpers last year, Specialized now offers every model in both 27.5in and 29in. Trek's wheel size split is even more telling as to where the bike industry is heading: there are five 27.5in Remedys and only two 29ers. Rose, on the

other hand, keeps it simple by making a completely different bike for the trail rider set on 29in wheels.

The 27.5in trail bike is designed to cover the widest variety of terrain possible, so let's take a closer look at what our trio have in common before we reveal what sets them apart. The price of 1x11 drivetrains has been tumbling, and we expect to see even more bikes equipped with them in the future, but it's too little, too late for this test. All three bikes here are still sporting 2x10 drive trains and, while not really cutting-edge, two chainrings up front still provide the widest range or spread of gears to stop you grinding to a halt on the climbs or spinning-out on descents. Chain retention is nothing like as good, though, even with stabilising clutch rear derailleurs.

RockShox takes a clean sweep in the fork department, whereby Rose has used its direct sales approach to leverage a 150mm Pike into proceedings and still remain the cheapest bike in this test. The Specialized and Trek are both rocking skinny Revelations, with 150mm and 140mm travel respectively.

Launched back in May of this year, the Specialized Stumpjumper is the newest bike in the test. In fact, Specialized is billing it as an early 2016 release. Now, confusing as bike model years are, we think that Specialized is stretching it a little, and it could just as easily be considered a late-2015 arrival, which is why we've included it here. Will the early release give Specialized a head start? Let's find out.



The photos may be from Surrey, but Wales hosted the testing

WHERE AND HOW

Tale of the test

Once again we've been lining the coffers of the Severn Bridge. But it is money well spent, as the longer, steeper, more technical trails to be found in south Wales are more than enough to take 140/150mm trail bikes and their riders to the absolute limit.

First, we rode all of the bikes 100 per cent stock to get an idea of the manufacturers' intended handling, then fitted our Maxxis control tyres. We also swapped out handlebars and stems where necessary. Once we had the fit of each bike dialled in, the next task was to get the suspension sorted. Tweaking fork pressures only got us so far in terms of set-up, and the easiest and most effective change was fitting Bottomless Tokens to the RockShox forks on the Rose and Specialized. Interestingly, only the Revelation on the Trek had a Bottomless Token fitted as standard.

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DT Swiss M1700 Spline
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With 150mm travel front and rear, the Granite Chief is pitched squarely at aggressive trail riding

Don't fancy the brushed alloy frame finish? No problem, as Rose offers two more colour options



ROSE GRANITE CHIEF 2 27.5

£1,986.09

SPECIFICATION

Frame 7005 aluminium, 150mm travel

Shock RockShox Monarch RT3

Fork RockShox Pike RC, 150mm travel

Wheels DT Swiss M1700 Spline Two, Schwalbe Nobby Nic 27.5x2.35in tyres

Drivetrain Shimano XT chainset, f-mech and r-mech, SLX shifters

Brakes Formula CR1, 203/180mm

Components Race Face Turbine 740mm bar/80mm stem, RockShox Reverb Stealth 150mm

Sizes S, M, L, XL

Weight 13.71kg (30.2lb)

Contact
rosebikes.co.uk

GEOMETRY

Size tested L

Head angle 66.4°

Seat angle 69.4°

BB height 333mm

Chainstay 438mm

Front centre 736mm

Wheelbase 1,174mm

Down tube 694mm

Top tube 600mm

Reach 439mm

While Canyon and YT hog the limelight on the German direct-sales stage, Rose has been busy working away in the wings, building incredible bikes at equally competitive prices.

What really sets Rose apart, however, is its extensive range of customisation options. Take the 150mm-travel Granite Chief 2 27.5 for example; it's one of several base models in the Granite Chief range, but you can change pretty much every component when ordering the bike. Don't fancy the Formula CR1 brakes? No problem; Rose has three other options including Shimano XT and SRAM Guide RSCs for a small up-charge. Not all changes incur a price hike either, like the choice of Schwalbe Nobby Nic or Continental X King tyres. All in, it's pretty much akin to a full custom build.

But enough about the spec options, let's take a closer look at the Granite Chief frame. Rose has given its trail bikes a facelift for 2015, so sleek hydroformed pipes and modern angles have replaced the old chunky tubes and funky geometry. With its brushed alloy finish, this bike is simply stunning. And it's not just a looker; it's packed with all the latest mod cons too, including a tapered head tube and 142x12mm rear end.

To maintain the frame's smooth flowing lines, the Granite Chief sports internal cable routing, where four cables enter the head tube and three pop out just under the BB – the Reverb cable running up into the seat tube. They aren't secured inside the frame though, and from the first ride it was apparent that cable rattle would plague the Rose.



SUSPENSION

The suspension design on the Granite Chief is an FSR/VPP hybrid. As such, you have a Horst Link pivot on the chainstay and a counter-rotating upper link, pumping out 150mm of travel. Damping duties are care of a RockShox Monarch RT3 shock, which has rebound adjustment and three compression settings.

Keeping it RockShox front and rear is the excellent 150mm-travel Pike RC. It's not the top-end model, but at this price point we certainly weren't complaining. The bike ships with two Bottomless Tokens ➤



Quality RockShox Pike fork comes with two Bottomless Tokens

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that includes a
RockShox
Pike fork

**LOWS**

The constant
rattle of the
internal cables



Formula brakes are
powerful but 'grabby'



Monarch shock: either
too harsh or too soft

in the welcome pack and none in the fork, and we suggest fitting them both during initial assembly.

COMPONENTS

With its slick-shifting Shimano XT transmission, and 150mm-travel RockShox Reverb dropper post, it's hard to find fault with the component package on the Rose, especially when you can swap or upgrade most parts. There's always room for improvement though, and the 80mm Race Face stem felt out of place with the relaxed steering geometry. Also, the Formula CR1 brakes require a very delicate touch if you don't want the DT Swiss wheels locking up.

PERFORMANCE

With our control tyres and a 55mm stem fitted, the Rose looked and felt ready to rock. But, just like the Specialized, the rear suspension didn't want to play ball, feeling harsh off the top but soft in the middle of the travel. We tried running less air pressure in the shock to get it moving more easily, but this just made the back end feel even more wallopy and dead.

In the end, we gave up on the Monarch shock open setting altogether, running

it instead in the mid-threshold setting. Even then, the bike would still sink into its travel too readily when grinding in the 38t chainring. We also smashed the chainring repeatedly when hopping over logs and rocks. It's as if the suspension on the Rose has been designed around a 34t chainring, but the two options on the XT chainset are either too big or too small to give the perfect chain line relative to the suspension. Still, with the Pike up front, we could tuck in behind the fork and charge hard on even the most challenging trails.

VERDICT

Rose has definitely stepped it up a notch or two with the latest version of the Granite Chief — new tubing profiles and revised geometry bringing this 150mm-travel trail bike bang up to date. At 13.7kg it's impressively light too.

It's not perfect though. We struggled to find a rear suspension set-up that offered the optimum balance between pedalling efficiency and grip. It seems like you can have one or the other, but not both. Also, we couldn't live with the non-stop rattle of the cables inside the down tube. Earplugs should definitely come in the welcome pack.

8

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With a 421mm chainstay length, the Stumpy has a seriously short back end

The 650b version of the Stumpy gets 150mm travel front and rear, where the shock features Climb, Trail and Descend compression modes

Size specific components see fatter grips and bigger rotors on the L and XL sizes

Roval rims with their wide 30mm internal width offer increased tyre stability at lower pressures



SPECIALIZED STUMPJUMPER FSR COMP 650B

£2,200

SPECIFICATION

Frame M5 aluminium
150mm travel

Shock Fox Float EVO
CTD w/Autosag

Fork RockShox
Revelation RC3,
150mm travel

Wheels Hi Lo hubs,
Roval rims, Specialized
Butcher/Purgatory
27.5x2.3in tyres

Drivetrain SRAM S1250
chainset, X7 f-mech and
shifters, X9 r-mech

Brakes Shimano Deore,
203/180mm

Components Specialized 750mm bar,
75mm stem, Command
Post IRCC

Sizes S, M, L, XL

Weight 14.06kg (30.9lb)

Contact specialized.com

GEOMETRY

Size tested L

Head angle 67°

Seat angle 70.1°

BB height 325mm

Chainstay 421mm

Front centre 740mm

Wheelbase 1,161mm

Down tube 703mm

Top tube 600mm

Reach 442mm

Last year the 650b Stumpy Evo was something of a Frankenbike: a 650b rear end bolted to a 29er front triangle. This year Specialized has pulled out all the stops and it now has a dedicated 650b frame.

It still has 150mm of travel, but one big change is that the back end is now much shorter. In fact, at 421mm, the chainstay length is identical to the old 26in Stumpy. Specialized achieved this by eliminating the seatstay bridge for improved clearance at full travel, and mounting the front mech on a removable Taco Blade that rotates as the suspension compresses. To compensate for any loss in frame stiffness caused by taking away the bridge, Specialized has reinforced the upper shock link and beefed up the seatstays. The only downside is the back of the bike now feels heavier than before.

Looking at the rest of the vital stats, the new 650b Stumpy is slightly shorter and slacker than before, but still retains the incredibly low 325mm bottom bracket height. To put that into context, the new Stumpy is 15mm lower than some of the lowest 160mm bikes and 10mm lower than the 135mm-travel 29er. So, super-low!

SUSPENSION

We're big fans of Specialized's Autosag shock technology, as it takes the guesswork out of suspension set-up and it's more accurate than using the sag gradients on RockShox shocks. It usually works like a charm, but because the BB is so low on the 650b Stumpy, we couldn't run the recommended sag setting without constantly clipping our pedals. The suspension also felt overly soft when set up using Autosag — the rear end totally out of sync with the RockShox Revelation fork. →





New Command Post IRcc offers 12 positions and an amusing noise



Front mech pivots to keep the chain-line in sync with the swingarm position



HIGHS
New Command Post works like a dream

LOWS
The BB height is still too low

COMPONENTS

The eagle-eyed among you may have noticed that Specialized has dropped the Evo tag. Basically, all Stumpys now get the extra travel, slacker geometry, wider bars and shorter stems as standard. The 75mm stem on the large bike is still excessive though, pulling your weight too far over the front of the bike and overloading the Revelation fork. Specialized could easily get away with fitting 60mm stems to all four frame sizes.

One massive improvement on the new Stumpy is the Command Post IRcc. Gone are the three fixed positions, instead you now have 12 Cruise Control settings that make it super easy to achieve the optimum saddle height.

The seatpost makes an amusing farting noise as it passes through its 12 settings on the way down. It still shoots up like a rocket though, so you need to make sure your tackle is well out of harm's way before hitting the grip-mounted ejector button.

PERFORMANCE

Our first ride on the new Stumpy left us more than a little deflated. We hated it. The rear suspension felt all over the place, and we couldn't seem to get the timing needed to attack the trails with the same pace as the Stumpy 29. Swapping to a 55mm stem definitely put us in a better position on the bike, but it wasn't until we fitted two Bottomless Tokens to the Revelation fork and started upping the air pressure in the Fox rear shock that things really started to improve. It never felt perfect, though.

That's because the BB height on the Stumpy 650b is so low that you're forced to run the shock harder than desired just to elevate the BB and gain some pedal clearance. And even with the shock overinflated, the bike has a tendency to squat when cranking hard in the 36t chainring. So even if you have the legs to push the big ring on the climbs, it makes more sense to drop down into the smaller chainring and

use the associated increase in chain tension to tighten up the suspension response and make the bike pedal more efficiently. This tendency to squat under power isn't as pronounced as on the Rose, but once it's in your head that precious energy is being wasted, it's impossible not to dwell on it.

VERDICT

With a dedicated frame, super-short chainstays and slacker geometry the Stumpy 650b is born again. Unfortunately, Specialized has also kept the one feature that bugged us about the old version and that's the super-low BB.

Sure it makes the Stumpy 650b feel stable at speed and it absolutely rails corners, but you end up having to overinflate the rear shock just to achieve a sensible amount of pedal clearance with obvious knock-on effects elsewhere. If you can live with your heels dragging the ground it's a fun bike, just don't expect to pedal up a rocky, Lake District climb.





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mbr
MOUNTAIN BIKE RIDER

Shimano brakes with 180mm rotors front and rear provide more than enough stopping power. They are super reliable too

Flip the Mino Link to change the geometry. The low setting feels just right, so we'd like to see Trek offer an even lower setting and ditch the high option

Deore shifters offer a light, crisp shift and the Two-Way release feature means you can choose to down-shift with your finger or thumb



TREK REMEDY 7 27.5IN

£2,000

SPECIFICATION

Frame Alpha Platinum aluminium, 140mm travel

Shock Fox Float EVO DRCV

Fork RockShox Revelation RL, 140mm travel

Wheels Bontrager Duster hubs, Duster Elite rims, Bontrager XR4 Expert 27.5x2.35in tyres

Drivetrain SRAM S1010 chainset, X7 f-mech, Shimano SLX r-mech and Deore shifters

Brakes Shimano Deore, 180mm

Components Bontrager 750mm bar and 70mm stem

Sizes 15.5, 17.5, 18.5, 19.5, 21.5in

Weight 14.16kg (31.2lb)
Contact trekbikes.com

The Remedy has undergone numerous revisions over the years. One thing that's remained unchanged however, is its intent — it's always been Trek's do-everything trail bike.

In its current format, that means 140mm travel along with the choice of either 27.5in or 29in wheels — the biggest wheels being the preserve of the higher price point bikes. Even on the entry-level 27.5in bike, you still get all of the Trek's frame technology, including its top-quality aluminium construction with an E2 tapered head tube and ABP (Active Braking Pivot) suspension.

You even get rubber armour on the underside of the down tube, to protect the frame from rock strikes, just like you do on the expensive carbon models.

The Remedy frame is not the lightest though, and the weight of the bike will creep up even further if you choose to fit a dropper post. The Remedy is, however, the most solid bike in this test by quite some margin — something that heavier riders will no doubt appreciate.

GEOMETRY

Size tested 19.5in

Head angle 68.2°

Seat angle 70.2°

BB height 344mm

Chainstay 436mm

Front centre 730mm

Wheelbase 1,166mm

Down tube 700mm

Top tube 600mm

Reach 442mm





HIGHS
Top level performance at a great price



SUSPENSION

Being the entry-level bike in the range, the Remedy 7 doesn't come with Trek's new RE:aktiv damper. You still benefit from Trek's DRCV shock, with its twin air can design. And Trek has finally delivered on its promise of two shocks in one; the Remedy 7 offers great support at sag, but thanks to the second air chamber — which sits on top of the shock and kicks in mid-way through the travel — you can still blow the O-ring clean off the shock body on bigger hits.

Up front, the 140mm RockShox Revelation fork doesn't get Trek's signature G2 steering geometry, with its increased offset, and the handling on the Remedy is so much better for it. The steering is much less twitchy at speed, and felt less floppy when climbing too.

COMPONENTS

OK, so the Remedy doesn't get a dropper seatpost. But just like a TV without a remote, it doesn't affect the quality of the picture. Yes, it's a pain having to stop to raise or lower the saddle — just like getting off your ass to switch channels — but given that the Trek is £200 cheaper than the Specialized, with a similar, if not better, spec, you could actually buy yourself a RockShox Reverb with change to spare.

We never thought we'd say this about a Trek, but the Remedy had the shortest stem on test! And while 70mm isn't short by today's standards, it offered the best fit and feel straight out of the box. The 750mm bar is plenty wide enough, but it had a little too much backsweep for our liking. This probably worked in Trek's favour though, as the profile of the bar had the same effect as reducing the stem length.

PERFORMANCE

When the Trek showed up, we thought we'd been sent the women's version by mistake — the frame looked so low-slung and compact. The numbers don't lie, however, and sizing and reach on the 19.5in frame felt absolutely bang-on once we hit the trails.

Best of all, it took minimal effort on our part to get a good suspension set-up — the Remedy offering the most neutral and balanced ride from the get-go.

The rear suspension provided much more support than either the Specialized or Rose, and we loved being able to ride it, up or down, with the shock always in the open setting.

It just felt so efficient and responsive. It was also the only bike on test to come with a Bottomless Token preinstalled in the fork.

It's one seriously solid bike too. Slam a berm, or land a drop sideways, and the Remedy brushes it off and presses ahead with no loss of pace or composure. Add into the mix that the rear tyre always breaks traction just before the front washes out, and it's a sure-fire recipe for a fun, confidence-inspiring trail bike.

TEST WINNER!
mbr

LOWS
The low geometry setting could be lower!



VERDICT

Even though the Remedy 7 27.5 is the entry-level model, it's got all the bases covered. The alloy frame is bomber solid, the 140mm travel suspension is superbly tuned and easy to set up, and while the specification isn't standout, it's competitive and, more importantly, functional. The bike feels built to last too.

Of course, there are some things we'd change to gain those final few per cent in performance — like swapping the handlebar and tyres — but these are easy fixes. Trek's already got the perfect blend of ingredients, and any changes would just be the icing on the cake.

9



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Conclusion

When we started to assemble the bikes for this test, we thought the Rose would win hands-down. After all, the spec on the Granite Chief 2 is amazing, the new alloy frame has great geometry, the price is killer and it is the lightest bike here by quite some margin... It didn't pan out that way, however.

It was the rear suspension that prevented the Rose from really blossoming. It's not that it's bad, by any means; we just couldn't get a set-up that we were totally happy with. Set the sag so the rear suspension has good small-bump sensitivity and it squats too much when pedalling. Increase the shock pressure, up the threshold for extra support and the rear wheel would lose traction and dance over the bumps, rather than soaking them up. Maybe the Fox Float Factory series shock, for an additional £68, would have been a better partner for the rear suspension, but it's impossible to say without trying it. The biggest thorn in the side of the Granite Chief, however, was the constant rattle of the cables inside the down tube, without which Rose would have walked away with a nine rating rather than an eight. It really was that bad!

After travelling further down the 29er road than any other brand, Specialized found itself playing catch-up last year, as 27.5in wheels really began to take off. This year, the Stumpy, Camber and Enduro are all available in both wheel sizes, so it's fair to say that Specialized now has all the bases covered. The new 650b Stumpy didn't set our world on fire in the same way that the 29er did when we first rode it, though. It's a solid package, and Specialized has pulled out all the stops to get the chainstays as short as they were on the old 26in Stumpy. But was it worth it? We're not convinced, at least not on the entry-level Comp model. The shock tune didn't feel 100 per cent, and the ultra-low BB really limits set-up options, as you end up having to adjust the rear suspension for pedal clearance, rather than grip or comfort.

So that just leaves one bike, the Trek Remedy 7. It instantly impressed us with its affable nature, it was super-easy to set up, and even easier to ride. It helps, too, that it looks amazing. With a RockShox fork, it's something of an anomaly in the Remedy 27.5in range. More importantly, it's the only model not to get the increased fork offset that usually comes part and parcel with Trek's G2 geometry.

Why do we consider this an advantage? Without getting too techy, increasing fork offset reduces trail, and this makes the bike handle like it's got a steeper head angle than it actually has. So, without the extra offset, the steering response on the Remedy 7 feels much less nervous, and this really lets you capitalise on the super-solid frame construction and amazing rear suspension. It's easily one of the most capable 140mm bikes we've tested to date.



RANGE FINDER

Our test winner's stablemates

TREK REMEDY 9 29

£3,500

Like the idea of an incredibly capable 140mm bike, but want the additional stability of 29in wheels? Trek has it covered with the Remedy 9 29. For the entry-level 29er, it's not cheap, but you do get a SRAM 1x11 drivetrain, Shimano XT brakes and a Pike fork; out of the box, all it needs is a shorter stem.



TREK REMEDY 9.9 27.5

£6,000

If you're looking for the ultimate 27.5in trail bike, the Remedy 9.9 with its OCLV carbon frame and Shimano XTR 1x11 groupset may be it. It comes with the new RE:aktiv damper, taking the 140mm-travel ABP rear suspension to a new level of plushness and control. Our only concern is that the Fox 34 fork may struggle to stay ahead of the rear suspension.



TEST
WINNER!
mbr

SPECIFICATION

This month's bikes at a glance

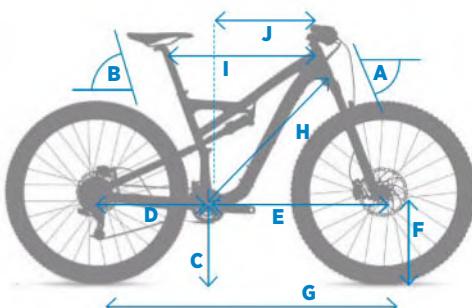
Make/model	Rose Granite Chief 2 27.5	Specialized SJ FSR Comp	Trek Remedy 7 27.5
Price	£1,986.09	£2,200	£2,000
Weight	13.71kg (30.2lb)	14.06kg (30.9lb)	14.16g (31.2lb)
Contact	rosebikes.co.uk	specialized.com	trekbikes.com
FRAME			
Sizes	S, M, L, XL	S, M, L, XL	15.5, 17.5, 18.5, 19.5, 21.5in
Size tested	L	L	19.5in
Frame material	7005 alloy	M5 alloy	Alpha Platinum aluminium
Suspension fork	RockShox Pike RC Solo Air	RockShox Revelation RC3	RockShox Revelation RL
Rear shock	RockShox Monarch RT3	Fox Float Evo CTD AutoSag	Fox Float Evo CTD DRCV
Front travel	150mm	150mm	140mm
Rear travel	150mm	150mm	140mm
WHEELS			
Hubs	DT Swiss 15/142mm	Specialized Hi Lo 15/142mm	Bontrager Duster 15/142mm
Rims	DT Swiss M1700 Spline Two	Roval 650b	Duster Elite 27.5in
Spokes	DT Swiss	Stainless	Stainless
Tyres	Schwalbe Nobby Nic 27.5x2.35in	Specialized Butcher Purgatory 27.5x2.3in	Bontrager XR4 Expert 27.5x2.35in
GROUPSET			
Shifters	Shimano SLX	SRAM X7 2x10	Shimano Deore 2x10
Front mech	Shimano XT	SRAM X7	SRAM X7
Rear mech	Shimano XT Shadow Plus	SRAM X9 Type II	Shimano SLX Shadow Plus
Crank	Shimano XT 38/24	SRAM S1250 36/24	SRAM S1010 36/24
Bottom bracket	Shimano	SRAM PF30	SRAM PF
Brakes	Formula CR1	Shimano Deore	Shimano Deore
Rotor sizes	203/180mm	203/180mm	180mm
COMPONENTS			
Saddle	Rose SL	BG Henge Comp	Bontrager Evoke 2
Seatpost	RockShox Reverb Stealth	Command Post IRCC	Bontrager SSR
Handlebar	Race Face Turbine 740mm	Specialized 750mm	Bontrager 740mm
Stem	Race Face Turbine 80mm	Specialized 75mm	Bontrager Rhythm 70mm
Rating			

ANGLE FINDER

Geometry: what the numbers mean

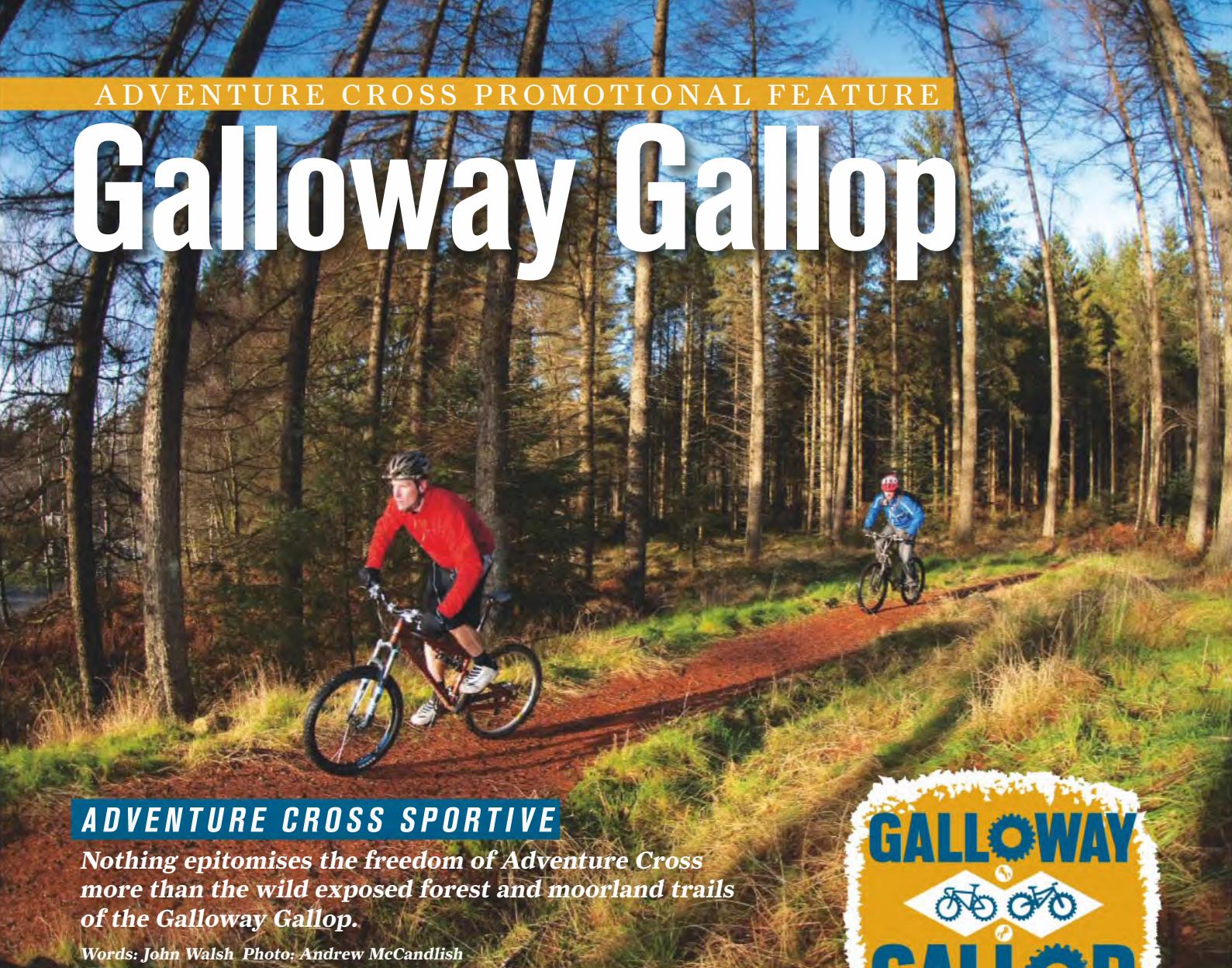
More often than not, the numbers listed in our geometry table don't match those quoted on the manufacturers' websites. This disparity arises because we painstakingly measure each bike in the **mbr** workshop, while the numbers listed online are from a computer drawing.

We don't live in a perfect world; welded tubes distort, shocks have manufacturing tolerances of +/- 5mm and sometimes the factories making the frames just don't follow the plans accurately. Tyres sizes can vary between models in a range too, and this has a big effect on the BB height. It's the key reason why we measure all of the test bikes with our control tyres fitted.



	Rose	Specialized	Trek
A Head angle	66.4°	67°	68.2°
B Seat angle	69.4°	70.1°	70.2°
C BB height	333mm	325mm	344mm
D Chainstay	438mm	421mm	436mm
E Front centre	736mm	740mm	730mm
F Wheelbase	1,174mm	1,161mm	1,166mm
G Down tube	694mm	703mm	700mm
H Top tube	600mm	600mm	600mm
I Reach	439mm	442mm	442mm

Galloway Gallop



ADVENTURE CROSS SPORTIVE

Nothing epitomises the freedom of Adventure Cross more than the wild exposed forest and moorland trails of the Galloway Gallop.

Words: John Walsh **Photo:** Andrew McCandlish

The routes of the Galloway Gallop were designed to allow riders to really get a feeling for the area and enjoy the sensations that being in such an unspoilt wilderness can conjure up.

The route is predominantly forest road so is significantly less technical than some other rounds, however that doesn't mean there is no variety on offer as you will be riding everything from loose gravel to bedrock or even crushed shells - a highly unusual man-made surface.

Deep breath....

There are plenty of challenging climbs and the views at the top are breathtaking - even more so than the effort of climbing them. It is advisable to keep something in reserve for Archie's Alp, which features right at the end of both routes and is a test of the legs even when fresh.

One of the key things to be aware of is the exposed nature of parts of this route, for while there are lots of sections within the shelter of the forests, you will also find long stretches of open moorland. Fingers crossed for a glorious September day like last year but even so make sure you are carrying extra layers. In 2009 Galloway Forest was the first in the UK to be given the status of Dark-Sky Park by the

International Dark-Sky association. It's a reflection of how empty the park is - there are no homes or street lights to pollute the night sky. However, while the forest initially appears empty of man-made intrusions, evidence of human activity is all around.

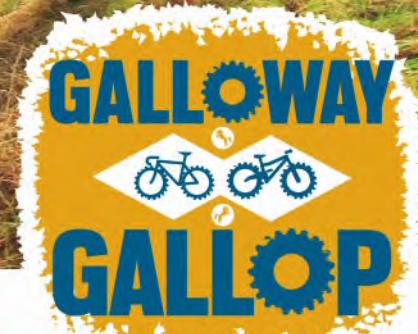
Making tracks

The route runs along part of an old railway line and through an old platform. It's one of the only giveaways, other than the viaduct that you ride across, that a railway ever existed there.

It is claimed that the moment when John Buchan jumped off the train in The 39 Steps was inspired by the terrain at Loch Skerrow and Big Water of Fleet Viaduct. The platform at Loch Skerrow, which the route passes through, was one of the highest and most remote in the country when it was in use. Of all the Adventure Cross routes this is the most remote and wild - it is a real antidote to the busy and often overcrowded roads many of us are used to riding on, definitely an experience not to miss out on.

WHY RIDE IT?

Wild wilderness forest tracks on exposed moorland, not technically challenging but it will take you into remote areas which rarely get ridden.



THE DETAILS

DATE

Sunday 20th September 2015

WHERE IS IT

Kirroughtree MTB Centre, Galloway Forest, Dumfries, Scotland.

For most the drive out to Dumfries and Galloway might be a little further but the riding is definitely worth the journey.

Postcode: DG8 7BE

HOW TO ENTER

Visit www.bookmyride.co.uk

WHERE TO STAY

The Bruce Hotel in the nearby town of Newton Stewart is a bike friendly inn serving hearty food. www.the-bruce-hotel.com

Fernlea Bed and Breakfast offers cycle storage in a Scandinavian style house a short walk from the town centre. www.fernlea-bnb.co.uk

LOCAL BIKE SHOP

The Break Pad, Kirroughtree Visitors Centre. Always a friendly welcome from Sam and her crew at the head of the renowned trail centre. www.thebreakpad.com

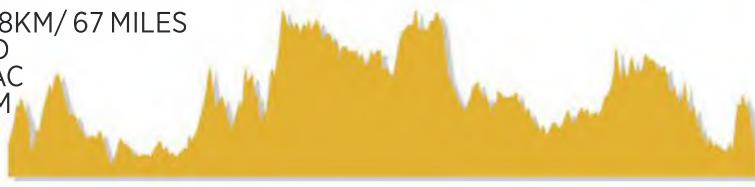
CW difficulty rating: Technical terrain difficulty: 3/5 Wilderness Riding 3/5

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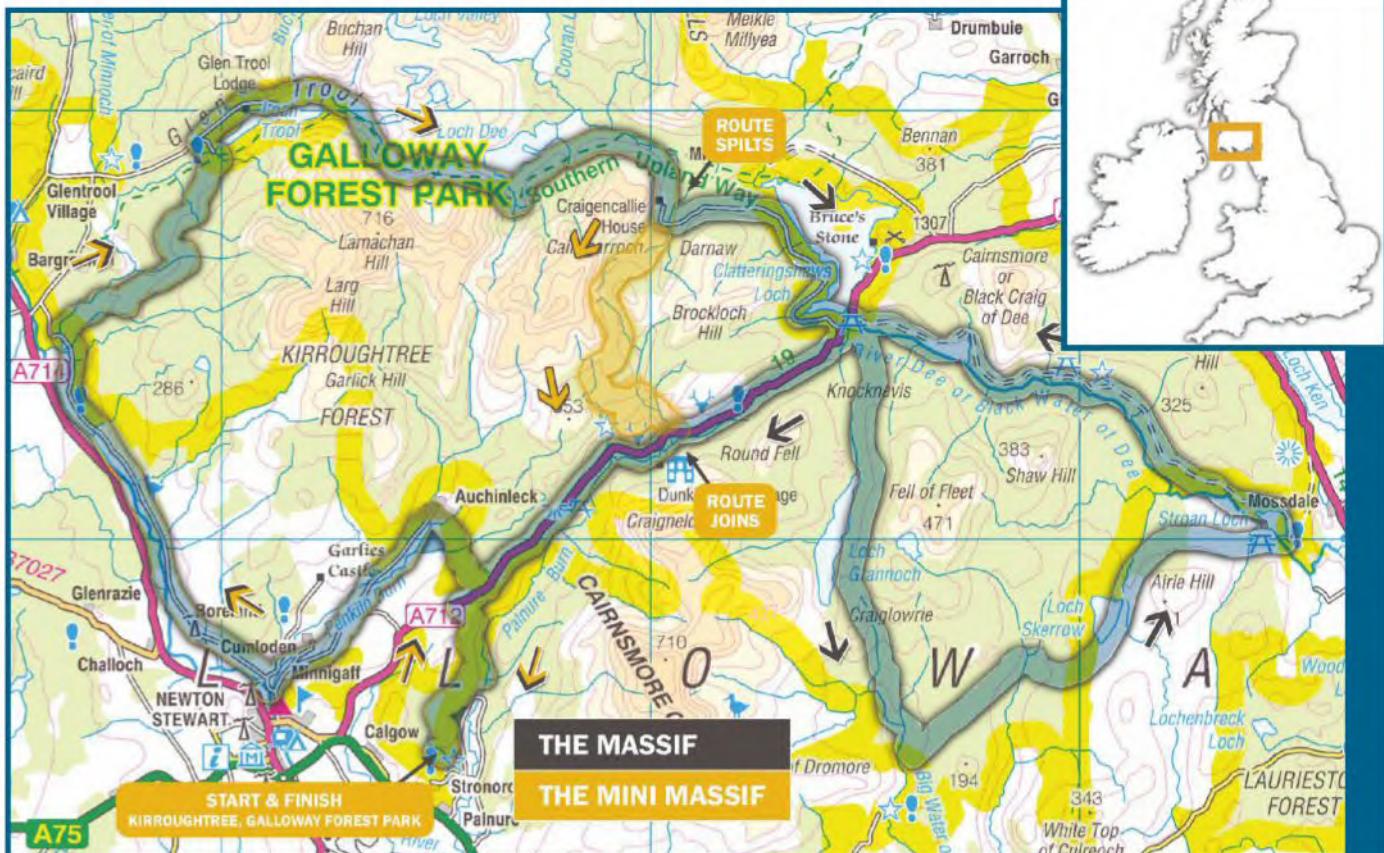
MASSIF STATS

TOTAL DISTANCE- 107.8KM/ 67 MILES
59% (64KM) OFF ROAD
41% (44KM) ON TARMAC
TOTAL ASCENT- 2700M



MINI MASSIF STATS

TOTAL DISTANCE- 67.6KM/ 42 MILES
53% (36KM) OFF ROAD
47% (32KM) ON TARMAC
TOTAL ASCENT- 2006M



CHALLENGES

1 Kirroughtree Kracker

A challenging rough surfaced climb to kick the day off and get the blood pumping. It will wake up the legs and give you a little taste of what is to come.

2 Bruce's Bonus

This off-road sector is possibly the most technical riding of the day. If the weather has been wet a small stream runs over the rocks.

3 Archie's Alp

The last challenge of the day holds a real sting, this steep zig-zag climb is tough and will feel even harder at the end of the ride.

Afterimage

Our favourite people choose their favourite photos

AS CHOSEN BY...

**DAN BARHAM,
PHOTOGRAPHER**



Who: Mike Mulroy
Where: Ladybower Reservoir
When: Early 2005



Expat Dan Barham left the smoggy mills of Manchester for the skyscrapers and famous trails of Vancouver. From his downtown penthouse apartment, he now gazes out across the harbour, stroking his cat and adding household names to his enviable client list.

Technically, I suppose this shot's borderline a bit rubbish. The horizon's off, poor old Mikey's face is a little hot (in the photographic sense) and I've lost the original digital negative, so it's stuck like this forever. But none of that mattered when I picked it as my best shot.

This somewhat shonky image is hugely important to me in two regards — first, it's that even in my present location, nestled neatly at the foot of Vancouver's North Shore mountains, it makes me wish I was riding back in the old country. I know, I know, the grass is always greener and all that, but in this shot of Mike Mulroy cruising around Derbyshire's Ladybower Reservoir, it really is. It takes me back to

a great time in my life, working in a bike shop, riding with a great group of friends, falling in love with bikes on a daily basis.

The second reason is entirely more mercenary; this is the first ever shot I sold for cold, hard cash. It was the glimmer of hope in a vast sea of uncertainty — becoming a successful photographer

seemed an impossible task at the time (it's only gotten more unrealistic the longer I've stuck at it), and it's the push that I needed to make a go of it — a decision that's changed my life in ways I could never have imagined.

You could say it was my best shot for giving it my best shot.

It makes me wish I was riding back in the old country. I know, the grass is always greener. But in this shot, it really is...



OUR PACK.
ALWAYS RADDER





THE TRAIL LEGEND REBORN

Handling, efficiency, utility: These aren't just words to us—they've been the hallmarks of the Stumpjumper FSR since we started this whole trail thing. And with fully integrated SWAT technology, a new geometry, and a proprietary shock tune, the Stumpy's ready to push the envelope all over again.

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